Security Challenges and Women Political Participation in 2019 General Elections in Nigeria: A Bird's Eye View

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Abstract

Election security is a key consideration in structuring electoral process and for smooth and robust participation in elections. The 2019 general elections were conducted amidst various security threats. As in the previous elections, cases of electoral insecurity such as killing, maiming, intimidation, molestation, hijacking of electoral materials, interferences by security agents and systematic manipulation of the party's structure which played out in favour of men were observed in the build-up and during the elections. Again, despite the fact that the age long known predicaments that engender discriminatory acts against women's full participation in politics appear unresolved, new and frightening challenges, especially in the area of security emerged. With it is the record of drops in women's participation in politics to unacceptable level in the face of increased women representation in many other countries of the world. It is against this backdrop that this paper takes a bird eye view on the implications of the spate of insecurity during the elections on the participation of women and their emergence into the elected and policy making positions in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Employing descriptive model of electoral violence, the paper argues that the quest by women to actualize 35% affirmative right action is hindered by the rise in militarization of the electoral process by the men. Through organized and established violence in elections and the failure of the security community to police the elections in Nigeria, many women were scared away always from participating actively in the electoral processes, thereby, leading to under-representation of women in elective positions. The paper recommends the use of legislation to regulate arbitrary conducts that creates insecurity in our elections, regulate the misuse of security personnel for the attainment of proportional representation in Nigeria; and amendment of Electoral Act to provide for strict punishment for electoral violence and offenders.

Key words: Affirmative Right Action Election, Security, Women Representation

Introduction

Recently, there seems to be a global effort towards addressing gender related issues with particular reference to women empowerment. These efforts were basically targeted on ending discrimination against women and at ensuring that women are empowered to compete favourably in all facets of nation building. These concerns led to the convocation of the Conference on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Affirmative Action Initiatives of the United Nations that came to limelight after the UN World Women Conference in Beijing, China in 1995 (Ogbaji, 2015). Even before these and other numerous protocols on women's right and on equity and equality contestations, feminists and advocates have always campaigned for gender equity as a means to end gender discrimination. However, much has not been achieved with all these as the equations of men/women's positions in public life have not changed, especially in politics.

Even at present, the spate of women's participation and representations is still very low compared to their men counter-part and this challenges the inclusiveness requirement for the achievement of development in electoral democracy (see Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2012). This is the observable situation in Nigeria party democracy and as Orji, Orji & Agbanyim (2018) explained, just achieved very little progress have been made in women's political representation, while some other African countries are making giant strides. With the global average in the share of women in national parliaments doubling in the past few years showing records of all regions making substantial progress towards the goal of 30 percent women's representation in decision making (IPU, 2015), twelve (12) countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are noted to be blazing the trail (IPU, 2015: 6). Specifically, Tripp (2003) have recorded that since 2003, Rwanda has maintained the record as the country with the highest female legislative representation in the world, surpassing the Nordic countries, with four (4) of the world's top 10 countries, in terms of women's share of single or lower house of parliament, being Sub-Saharan Africa countries of Rwanda, Seychelles, Senegal, and South Africa, one would therefore expect more in political representation of women in Nigerian political offices.

Unfortunately, in Nigeria, the current records show a disturbing reversion even in some of the gains women made in the past electoral cycles. This reduction is typified by the reduction in 2015 of the number of women in elective and appointive positions in 2011 and it appears that the situation has not improved. 2018 data show that woman's rates of participation in formal decision making remain one of the lowest on the continent and across the world with women occupying an abysmal 5.6 per cent (86 out of 1534) of all elective positions at both the national and sub-national levels (Leadership Newspaper January 18, 2019). Going by the record of the outcome of 2019 general elections, the situation is indeed degenerating.

TABLE 1**:** WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN VARIOUS ELECTIVE OFFICES (2003 – 2019)

S/N	Position	Available seat	Number of Women Elected				
			2003	**2007**	**2011**	**2015**	**2019**
1.	Presidency	1	0	0	0	0	0
2.	Senate	109	3(2.27%)	9(8.26%)	8(7.72%)	7(6.42%)	7(6.42%)
3.	House of Reps	360	21(5.83%)	25(6.98%)	12(3.33%)	22(6.10%)	11(3.05%)
4.	Governorship	36	0	0	0	0	0
5.	State House of Assembly	990	38(3.84%)	54(5.45%)	68(6.90%)	55(5.55%)	40(4.04%)

Source: Agbalajobi (2010): budgIT (2019)

Placing the records side by side with others countries of the world, Nigeria at best situates at the same level with countries that are known to have state religious and cultural policies of putting women out of public view in almost all things for some accepted reasons.

TABLE 2: WOMEN IN NIGERIAN PARLIAMENT

| World Ranking	House of Representatives				Senate			
	Elections	Seats	Women	%	Elections	Seats	Women	%
181	03.2015	360	20	5.6	03.2015	109	7	6.5
125	04.2011	360	24	6.8	04.2011	109	7	6.4
117	04.2007	360	25	7.0	04.2007	109	9	8.3
107	04.2003	360	17	4.9	04.2003	109	3	2.8
104	02.1999	360	12	3.4	02.1999	109	3	2.8

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women in National Parliaments" (1997)

These records challenge the arguments of gains and development in the country's democratic records, as it has been rightly noted that "the achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences" (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1997). This implies that absence of such balance in the political affairs of the state challenges every argument of growth and deepening of democracy in a polity. Previously, it has been the case of women not showing sufficient interests in election and political position. This has substantially changed as more number of women sought to occupy elective positions in various parts of Nigeria.

From the diagram, we could see an impressive record in number of women aspirants and of those that eventually emerged as candidates of their political parties. The rate of

success made by women in the main election itself is a different issue altogether. Earlier, Orji, Orji & Agbanyim (2018) identified some factors that inhibit the participation to explain why there are poor records of women's participation in politics in Nigeria. These includes socio-cultural and economic factors covering the numerous factors of gender ideology, cultural patterns, and predetermined social roles assigned to women and men as well as low literacy, poor childcare, inadequate health care, and poverty (see also Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2012, Aina, 2003; Nwankwo, 1996; Okonjo 1981).

Figure 1: Women's Rate of Aspirations during the 2019 General Elections

Source: Leadership Newspaper January 18, 2019
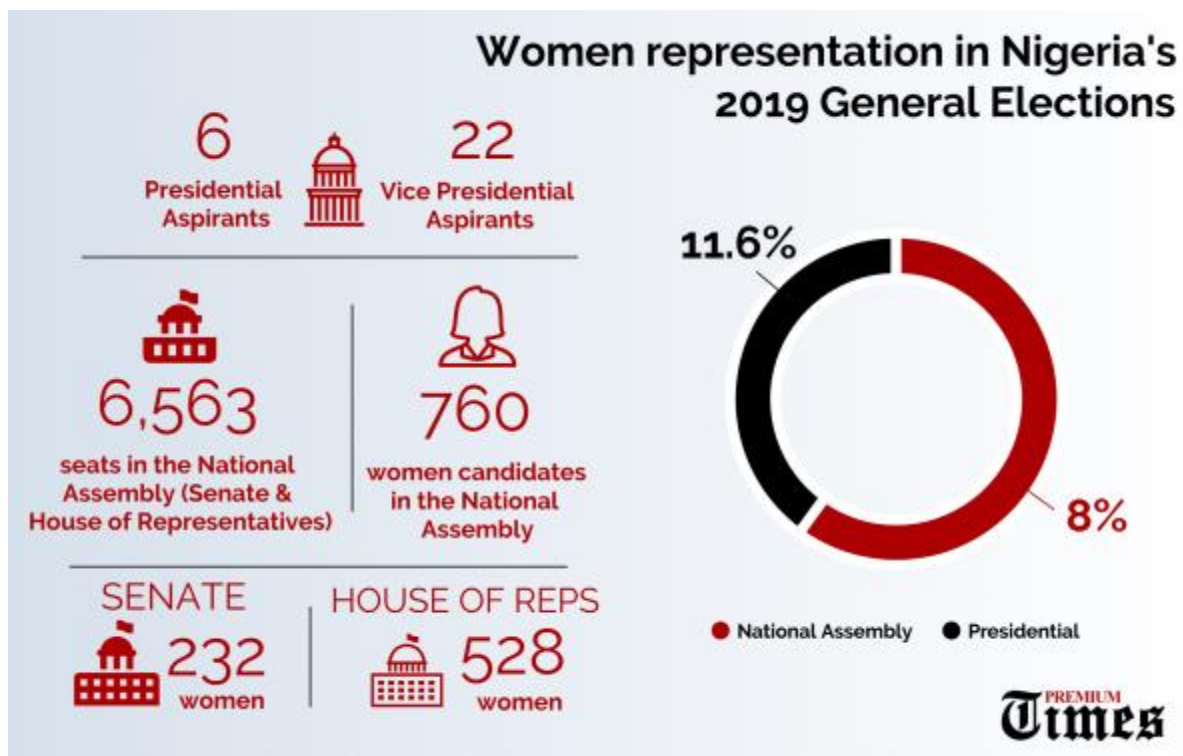
The other is the political factors which are explained under the five key factors relating factors of method of candidate nomination (which most times involve an expensive procedure requiring candidates to conduct their own campaigns); excessive use of money in politics, influence of party elders (who sometimes simply select, endorse and present a candidate supposedly to ease tension among contestants); deliberate obstruction (arising from arbitrary behaviour by party officials who may nominate candidates without an

election; change the election rules or voting system without proper notice to candidates, change the venues for primary elections, hold unscheduled meetings in unannounced venues, rig elections and cause violence and use "zoning" and other criteria selectively to eliminate unwanted (often female) aspirants); Violence (including physical violence, pressure, threat, and intimidation) (Okoosi-Simbine, 2012 in Orji, Orji & Agbanyim, 2018). Looking at the instance of some states in the Nigeria, the picture of retrogressive changes comes very clear. This is manifest in the fact that of the numerous political positions in the states, the women more than before occupy very insignificant position. For instance, this is the first time Anambra State is presenting only a single female member in the House of Assembly. Such bizarre case is also recorded with Ebonyi state, with no single woman in the Senate and House of Representative one would wonder the specific challenges that inhibit their performances during the elections and other general participation in politics.

Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2012) have explained however that the old predicaments that engender discriminatory acts in Nigeria have remained unresolved, while new and frightening challenges seem to be emerging. Top among them is the high level of aggression among the members of the political class, a situation that occurred during the early period of Nigerian political/electoral history with the violence that consumed the first republic (see Madiebo, 1982; Dare, 1993, etc). This is again becoming so widespread and accepted into our electoral politics as if it is an integral part of our political culture. Attesting to this facts and responding to it, the preparation for elections by the state, especially the Election Management Body (Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC) is, in the words of Jega (2012), akin to preparing for war. While some blame it to the culture of violence known with and adopted from the longtime of military rule, others blame it in the seeming unwillingness of the people in political positions to relinquish their holds to what has become a lucrative business for most of them (Nwanegbo, 2015). Whichever is the reason, the fact remains that there is a renewed culture of violence in our elections and not much attention have been given to the impact of the raging and indeed increasing spate of insecurity during elections on the drop in records of women's political attainments in Nigeria and Ebonyi state in particular and that is what this paper set for itself as the objective to achieve.

Conceptual and Theoretical Discourse
Globally, women constitute over half of the world's population and contribute in vital ways to general development of the society (Afolabi *et al*., 2003 in Agbalajobi, 2010). In most societies, women assume five key roles: mother, producer, home-manager, community organizer and socio-cultural and political activists. Of these roles mentioned, the last has been engendered by women movements attributed to historical gender discrimination and inequality. In line with global trend, Nigerian women constitute nearly half of the population of the country. But despite the population of women in the society, their roles are still not noticed, especially in politics. This according to Oluyemi (2017) is due to cultural stereotypes, religious abuse, traditional practices and patriarchal societal

structures. Especially in politics, lots of opinions have attributed it to violence, insecurity and the masculine nature of our political process generally.

In Nigeria, about 51 percent of women are involved in voting during elections. Despite these, women are still under represented in both elective and appointive positions (Oluyemi, 2017). Available statistics revealed that overall, political representation in government of Nigeria as at 2010 was less than 7 percent (Agbalajobi, 2010) and it is progressively reducing. This shows that Nigeria has not attained the affirmative as prescribed by the Beijing Platform of Action. Women's minimal participation in Nigeria has multi-dimensional implications for the democratic project in Nigeria and for the continuing quest for gender equality (Nwankwor and Nkereuwem, 2019). The 2019 general elections were the sixth consecutive general elections since the beginning of the fourth republic in 1999. This ought to marks what is undoubtedly a measure of democratic progress, if only for conducting periodic elections since the return to civil rule. What remains deeply in doubt, however, is how inclusive this progress has been and, in particular, to what extent women have benefited from the seeming opening of democratic requirement of equality and fairness.

As gender issues and women's political and economic empowerment take centre stage on the global arena, Nigeria appears intent on maintaining its position at the bottom of the ladder of women's political empowerment. Nigeria has been recording low participation of women in both elective and appointive positions this is a growing concern to many Nigerians. According to Nwankwor and Nkereuwem (2019), 2018 data show that women's rates of participation in formal decision making remain one of the lowest on the continent and across the world with women occupying an abysmal 5.6 percent (86 out of 1534) of all elective positions at both the national and sub-national levels and this according to budgIT (2019) has being of a great worry to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This is quite far from the situation in most countries as the global statistics for gender parity indicates that in 2015, of 188 countries, Nigeria was 152nd in the Human Development Index in Gender Inequality and 118th out of 192 countries in 2017. Although, there appear to be a growing number of women representations in political positions, this is still far below the Beijing declaration of 30% affirmative right for women, suggesting that more need to be done. While the records may have been an improvement to the past ones, the situation in Nigeria is still abysmal.

Many reasons appear to have been offered in literature on why women are subjugated in Nigerian societies where the current population projection presents the women (49.4%) to be almost of equal in numerical strength with men (50.6%) (UNDESA: Population Division, 17-07-2019 07:04:40). The kaleidoscope commentary on low women's involvement in the Nigerian politics according to Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2012) hinges it on issues of marginalization, male domination, cultural practices, abuse of religion, poverty, economic and social instability (see Folalo and Fwatshak 2008; Shvedova 2002; Arowolo and Aluko 2010; Agbalajobi 2010).

The term participation in itself entails 'involvement of citizens in some way with making decisions in political system' (Luka, 2011). Roberts and Edwards (1991) describe it

as a term which is usually applied to voluntary rather than coerced activities. They proceeded to explain the term by saying that when participation is used in political context it is "the voluntary activities of an individual in political affairs including inter alia: voting as one of the tenets of democracy, is found to be liberal and unrestrictive (cited in Luka 2011). On the other hand, politics of disempowerment could be seen as a deliberate or unconscious political effort to place a barrier to the actualization of one's political intention or dissuade him or her from participating or aspiring for political positions. By this, politics of disempowerment could mean placing undue political obstacles that would provide undue advantage for one person or group against others.

While records of history have explained the importance and contributions of women in the politics and traditional administration of many Nigerian societies (Izugbara and Onuoha, 2003; Ezeigbo, 1996) and even during the colonial era and in the making of the Nigerian Nation (Ezeigbo, 1996 cited in Tashi 1999: 95), yet issues of cultural and traditional practices have had severe implication on the ability, willingness and the involvement of women in socio-political cum administrative endeavours (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2012). According to the African leadership Forum, several traditional practices are injurious to women's self-esteem and self-image which are necessary ingredients for the confidence needed in political participation (cited in Yetunde, 2008:331). The issues of marriage institutions especially the polygamous set up, widowhood, child marriage, female circumcision, exorbitant bride price and rejection of wives by husbands because they could not have children are all identified setbacks that prevent the women from active political responsibilities (Yetunde, 2008:331). Hence, inspite of their population compared to men, they represent a very slim percentage of the people in politics.

The most accepted justification for this has always been this issue of culture and traditional practices. Though too, very strongly presented is also the challenge of violence in our elections. Nigerian women have over the years become target of violence of diverse form based on their positions in promoting transformative politics. Adeniyi (2003:353) identified violence and other forms of electoral conflicts perpetrated and perpetuated by men and male youths as the major barriers confronting and inhibiting women active participation in Nigerian politics. For Enemuo (2008:232) women are regularly exposed to various forms of physical, psychological, sexual and emotional violence.

Orji (2014) provided us with explanations on why the elections in Nigeria are often volatile. He anchored it on four issues; the nature of Nigerian politics, which is anchored "largely on privatization of the state to the benefit of personal and sectional interests" (Ake, 1985, Ekekwe, 1986, Ibeanu, 1999 in Orji, 2014); the existing communal tensions among the people of Nigeria (Ake, 1985, Ekekwe, 1986, Ibeanu, 1999 in Orji, 2014) which are also manipulated for political gains by the politicians. Attached to this position, budgIT (2019) noted that the history of elections in Nigeria has been characterized by threats to statehood based on the manipulation of ethnic groups as a divisive mechanism for the acquisition of political power by political actors; the fragile nature of political cum democratic institutions is acquainted with poor democratic culture among Nigerian citizen. The other factor is the existence of an army of unemployed and under-employed persons that

provide the services of generating and sustaining crisis in the polity (Sambanis, 2004, Ibrahim, 1991, Human Right Watch, 2007). Nwanegbo, Tsuwa, & Jega (2013) explains that if the army of youths in Nigeria properly channels their energy, consolidation of democracy and development would be achieved, while non-positive use of the youths in their energy opens them up for negative use which hinders democracy and by that development. Finally according to Orji is the inability of the state to adequately secure the electoral process (see also Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2014). This as he explained arose from the failure of the state to prevent or punish people involved in mass violence ostensibly as a result of corruption and poor governance. This weakness of the security and law enforcement in Nigeria is manifest in the inability of the security agencies to control crimes of all forms, ranging from banditry and illicit armed groups, cultism and flow of small arms in the society (see Nwanegbo, 2012). From whichever explanation, the bottom line is that there appear to be general acceptance to the fact that violence in Nigerian elections occur as a result of absence of controlling security mechanisms.

Elections in Nigeria from 1999 to date have continued to recycle in vicious violence and unimaginable manipulation especially from the political elites and this has attracted the attention of scholars. The violence coupled with the glaring disorganized manual election process has made participation in the elections very difficult, especially for the weak and vulnerable. In the records of BudgIT, (2019) it has discouraged a sizeable number of citizens from participating in the political process especially women (budgIT, 2019).

Security, meaning "to protect" and "to provide maximum protection for certain people, things and their environment" (Mediayanose, 2018) or safety from harm; the degree of resistance to, or protection from harm, is considered key to both people's participation and the overall tranquility of the electoral process. Just as it applies to any vulnerable and valuable asset, such as a person, community, nation or organization, it also applies especially to exercises that humans are involve in. it is of immense importance to elections. Electoral security on its own can be defined as "...the process of protecting electoral stakeholders such as voters, candidates, poll workers, media, and observers; electoral information such as vote results, registration data, and campaign material; electoral facilities such as polling stations and counting centers; and electoral events such as political party and coalition meetings, campaign rallies against, debates, etc can be disrupted by conflict leading sometimes to death, damage, or disruption, etc depending on the magnitude of the programme and the violence brought against it"[1]. Naturally, conflict disrupts socio-political activities and specifically, electoral conflict in an obstacle to the consolidation of democratic institutions for many countries. Even in stable political environments, elections can fall victim to conflict.

For this reason, several stages and components of the elections require security to operate. Indeed, in all its stages of preparation for election (covering the period of exercise of voter's registration, party primaries, pre and post primaries' litigations, period of party campaigns), election proper and the post-election activities which in Nigeria hardly ends until another election period, etc. It should be noted that activities such as voter registration are multi-day events and require sustained security over a period of time.

During election proper, the security agencies on electoral duties have a responsibility of ensuring that peaceful conditions are maintained at the polling and counting centers during elections and citizen's exercise of their franchise is carried out without fear of coercion, intimidation, violence, or manipulation and also protection of lives and properties of the citizenry (Nwoba, 2015). The duties/responsibilities of the security agencies include: alertness, approachability, maintenance of impartiality, fairness, use of force when necessary to restore peace and order, communication with superior and commanders during elections, awareness of electoral law, reporting, cooperation, and collaboration with other electoral officers in democratic process becomes very vital for the achievement of free and fair elections (Daily Sun Monday, March 28, 2011). The presence of security agencies during elections are also meant to avert any possible occurrence of electoral violations and human rights abuses.

The constitutional roles of security agencies in Nigeria during election are quite germane. Electoral security in Nigeria is primarily handled by police. In other words, the police are primarily saddled with the responsibility of making sure that people exercise their voting rights in an orderly manner with the help of other paramilitary organisations. It is indeed only on extreme situation of uncontrollable security breach capable of challenging national security that the military can be called.

From a broad perspective, four kinds of electoral security (and associated targets) can be identified: (a) Physical security: concerns the protection of facilities and materials, including the electoral commission headquarters and its district offices; registration and polling stations; political party offices; election observer offices; and media organizations. Facilities can also include the residences of election officials or candidates as well as hotels known to be frequented by international visitors, media or observers. (b) Personal security: focuses on electoral stakeholders, including voters, public officials, election workers, security forces, candidates, party agents, election observers and media representatives.[2] The gender, age and ethnicity of human targets should be noted. People can be victims of assassination, torture, sexual assault, strategic displacement, physical injury, blackmail or intimidation in attempts to influence their involvement and choices in an election. (c) Information security: concerns protection of computers and communication systems[3] employed in voter registration and vote tabulation, as well as associated sensitive election materials such as voted and un-voted ballots and voter registration lists. Their theft or destruction could have a potential "show stopper" impact on the election. If development programming is not undertaken to prevent, manage or mediate electoral conflict, then elections risk becoming venues for violence and intimidation, where conflict is employed as a political tactic to influence electoral outcomes. The importance of this issue extends beyond the electoral process alone, as the legitimacy of the resulting government is also at risk in situations where conflict has been employed to achieve governance

Arguably, women leaders, activists, women campaigners, sympathisers and scholars have continued to bemoan this insignificant level of gender equity in politics in Nigeria and particularly Ebonyi State but have not dwelt much on the place of insecurity and patterns of its affect on the participation of women. But clearly seen, it has become also

very difficult for women to hold themselves together as a people. The import of this is predisposition and invitation to conflict arising from contestation on who secures a few stipulated offices which implicitly reduces the number of women that succeed in occupying public office. This negates the theory of representation which upholds the equality of all people who are endowed with equal capability to rule. The representative theory banks on the wisdom of the masses and treats their representatives only as their agents or messengers (Guaba, 2005). Thus, representatives are saddled with the duty of translating the judgement of their constituents into concrete policy proposal in lieu of their personal conclusions. Indeed, circumventing democratic practices by preserving offices under the guise of women empowerment erode the spirit of democracy and probably appear diversionary. Women are preoccupied with inward hostility for a slated post rather than collective group effort to advance themselves and empower indigent women among them who are at the receiving end of the prevailing religious, cultural and socio-economic inequalities in the society.

It is important to note that for a group (in this circumstance women) to achieve their political interest, the women need to develop a platform that will serve as a strong interest group that is capable of influencing government policies in their favour and resist the temptation of being boxed into one position. There is no gainsaying the fact that women empowerment campaigners have engaged issues that boarder on cultural, economic, social and political subjugation over the years without much progress. As a result, there is need for a paradigm shift; individualism would be jettisoned for collectivism. Specification of office for the women should be de-emphasized to enable wider aspirations. Women should form a common front and fight as one. It is within this context that women could achieve much needed socio-economic and political equity.

Security Challenges Affecting Women Participation in Electioneering
Security challenges which manifest in the form of electoral violence has characterized Nigerian elections since independent (Kean, 2004). A brief look at the democratic history of Nigeria in relation to security challenges during elections and how it has affected women reveals that there has been recurrent trend of gender-based violence before, during and after elections since the 1965 general elections. The 2011 post-election violence resulted in the rape, gang rape and defilement of several unspecified number of female Corps Members by protesters across the Northern region (Orji and Uzodi, 2012). Pre-election violence has led to the death of many women supporters and innocent citizens. Likewise, election in Nigeria is characterized with intimidation and political thuggery (Jega, 2012). Similarly, most Nigerians, and in particular women political aspirants and other participants were apprehensive about their security and concerns about the capacity of the police force to offer them protection in the just concluded 2019 general elections. This prompted Agbalajobi, and Ayodeji (2016) to conclude that insecurity such as electoral violence is one of the major factors that limit women's political participation in Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted explanatory research design. This research design enabled us to test the eclectic theoretical paradigms that explained the underpinning factors precipitating communal violent conflicts in Ebonyi State. This study which is qualitative in nature used secondary method of data collection; basically, from published academic materials, government documents, periodicals and internet materials. Data for analysis exist in qualitative form. We carried out the three complementary steps of qualitative data analysis; data processing, data analysis and data interpretation.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Women Participation in Electoral Positions in Nigeria (1999-2019)

For more than five decades, the terms of the competition for electoral offices in Nigeria have been established by men. As Chapman in (Agbalajobi, 2010:2) maintained:

> men are the major determinants of political actions and inactions generally concerned with the perpetuation of power of the state… when women compete with men for access to political power, they do so on the terms already established by men for competing among themselves

Over the years, there have been marginal increase in women participation and representation in elective positions in Nigeria. However, the number of women the eventually clinch the positions is considerably very low. The data in Table 1 show low representation of women in elective offices when compared to men. The ratio which was 3% in 1999 rose by more than double to 7% in 2007, however, the gains achieved was short lived as 2011 witnessed sharp decline in women representation in elective positions to 4.1% but increased slightly in 2015 to 5.7%. The expectation was that women will consolidate on the gain made in 2015. Unfortunately, the number of women elected to public offices in Nigeria in the just concluded 2019 general elections decline sharply to 4.2%. This suggests a decline in the progresses made by women's previous outings since the inception of the fourth republic.

The number of women representation in various elective offices since 2003 to 2019 also reflects declining women representation in Nigeria (see Table 2). The data in Table 2 show that no female ever clinched the offices of president and governor since the inception of the fourth republic. Of the 109 Senate seats in Nigeria, the highest women have ever grabbed was 9 (8.26%) in 2007 which later dropped to 7(6.42%) since 2011 even up till 2019. Out of the 360 House of Representative members, women were only able to occupied 25 (6.98%) and 22 (6.10%) seats respectively in 2007 and 2015. However, these numbers declined to 11 (3.05%) in 2019. In the 36 States House of Assembly, the number of women members also decreased. From 68 (6.9%) in 2011, it dropped to 55 (5.55%) and 54 (5.45%) in 2015 and 2007 respectively and further decreased to 40 (4.04%) in 2019 election.

TABLE 3: AGGREGATE PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN ELECTED INTO ELECTIVE OFFICES (1999-2019)

Election Year	Percentage of Women Representation
1999	3.0
2003	4.5
2007	7.0
2011	4.1
2015	5.7
2019	4.2

Source: Okoronkwo-Chukwu (2013); budgIT (2019)

The performance of female candidates in elective positions in the 2019 election shows that 235 women, forming 12.34 percent of candidates, contested for slots in the Senate of which seven (6.42 per cent) were elected (see Table 3). This remained constant in the 8th Senate, which also accounted for 6.42 percent of the total number of elected senators. In the House of Representatives, 533 women contested, with the major parties fielding a total of 31 (15 APC and 16 PDP) candidates. However, only 11 (3.05 percent) were elected. The figures from the 8th House have thus been halved, as it had 22 female lawmakers. At the state level, no woman was elected governor. They formed 3.07 per cent of the total candidates. Of the 275 women forming 11.40 per cent of candidates for the Deputy Governorship, four (in Enugu, Kaduna, Ogun and Rivers) were elected. Thus, the number of female deputy governors has declined from six in the 2015-19 to four. While women have consistently held the position of deputy governor in Lagos State, the emergence of Obafemi Hamzat as deputy-governor elect marked a departure from the past. Down from 55 female state lawmakers in the incumbent regime, our preliminary analysis shows that 40 women have been elected into the state assembly.

TABLE 3: GENDER SEGREGATION BY POLITICAL OFFICES ASPIRED BY THE CONTESTANTS IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS

S/N	Position	Female	Male	Total Contestants
1	President	6(8%)	67(92%)	73 (100%)
2	Vice President	22(31%)	51(69%)	73 (100%)
3	Senate	234 (12.3%)	1669 (87.7%)	1903 (100%)
4	House of Representative	511 (10.9%)	4192 (89.1%)	4703 (100%)
5	Gubernatorial	80 (7.5%)	984 (92.5%)	1064 (100%)
	Grand Total	**853 (10.9%)**	**6,963 (89.1%)**	**7,816 (100%)**

Source: budgIT (2019)

It is an irony that despite the fact that women constitute 49.4 percent of Nigeria's population (budgIT, 2019), women political representation in the 2019 elections was

negligible, relative to the approximately half of the population they constitute, with only 2,970 women on the electoral ballot, representing only 11.36 percent of nominated candidates (Onyeji, 2019).

Trends in women's marginalisation have shown disturbing reversion in some of the gains women have made in past elections. This reduction is typified by the reduction in 2019 of the number of women in elective and appointive positions as at 2007 and 2011. Nwankwor and Nkereuwem (2019) while lamenting the declining representation of women in elective positions in Nigeria averred that:

> this negative trend is set to replicate itself in 2019 elections going by the intentional or unintentional exclusion of women's participation and voice in high stakes discussion of politics in Nigeria. Once again, gender and women's issues fail to move the needle of the national discourse, with themes of insecurity, the economy, and corruption dominating the debates. Perhaps, the sidelining of women is now worsened by Mrs Ezekwesili's withdrawal from the presidential contest.

The sudden withdrawal of female presidential front-runner, Oby Ezekwesili, from the 2019 elections barely one month to the polls threw into disarray rising gender equality discourse, particularly the hope that this election would place women squarely on the map of internal party negotiation and political power contestation, which her candidacy had inspired.

Although, she was just one of the six females among the 73 presidential candidates, her candidature was significant insofar as she was a direct repudiation of the gendered narratives that portray women candidates as incompetent and unable to compete in the world of politics. Her withdrawal, therefore, highlights women's continued marginalisation in electoral processes in Nigeria, both in terms of participation in electoral offices and as beneficiaries of the dividends of democracy. While women make up 47 per cent of registered voters for the 2019 elections, only eight percent were cleared to vie for electoral positions in 2019 presidential elections. Furthermore, all six women presidential candidates have withdrawn their candidacy and will not be standing for elections with their male counterparts even though their names remain on the ballot box. Nwankwor and Nkereuwem (2019) concluded that by all indications, women remain a significant minority in elective offices in the just concluded 2019 elections.

The most important political seat after the Presidency is the Legislature because of their important role of enacting laws for the good governance of the country. However, with more men in the 9th National Assembly, laws affecting issues of gender will always remain under-discussed. The general believe among female politicians in Nigeria is that if more women are elected into the National Assembly, they will encourage and help in making laws against most of the problems retarding their participation in political offices. The 9th National Assembly which has only 7 female Senators out of the 109 Senators and 11 House of Representative members out of the 360 members represents a serious setback to the quest for 30 percent affirmative right for women and the National Gender Policy

that came into existence on 15 August 2008, with the promise of providing women 35% affirmative action. The 9th National Assembly thus has serious work to do in order to ensure that gender equality bill is passed to enhance women participation in elective offices.

The dismal performance of women in the 2019 general elections (both the new entrants and those that were already occupying elective offices before 2019) indicates that a lot have to be done if they must effectively transcend political power in Nigeria. Various reasons have been adduced for the poor outing of women in the 2019 election. According to Onyeji (2019), some female candidates who contested the elections identified lack of funds, poor party structure, and 'stereotyping' as some of the challenges women faced in the just concluded 2019 election. However, reasons for the poor outing of women in the 2019 elections were mostly attributed to the country's political structure. The two major parties were accused of not allowing women 'enough space'. This assertion was supported by Onyeji (2019). He observed that women were not given even playing field, especially by the major parties – APC and the PDP, and this eventually led to the low number of women who emerged as party candidates.

Mrs Oby Ezekwesili in an interview with *Premium Times* asserted that "female aspirants were either intimidated or threatened to step down or were simply screened out and replaced with their male competitors" (Onyeji, 2019: 6). The former minister maintained that the dominant political parties of the (APC and PDP) elite "have entrenched a primaries system that inherently makes the emergence of women candidates near impossible." Away from party politics, other factors that played against women were large scale election violence, threats, rigging and vote buying (budgIT, 2019).

Election Security Challenges and Women Participation
The credibility of and consequently the acceptability of elections' outcomes in Nigeria have been contentious and litigious because of the inability secure such elections both in terms of pre-election, election day, and post-election processes (Igini, 2013). The failures of security agencies to secure elections often led to political crises and governance failures with frequent interruptions of the democratic governance through military interventions. For instance, it is on record that the controversial elections of 1964 and 1965 led to the coup de tat of January 1966; and the flawed election of 1983 produced the military coup of December 31, 1983; and the annulment of June 12, 1993 elections by the Babangida regime brought about the emergence of a fickle interim government that was declared illegal by a Federal High Court and shortly afterwards toppled by the Abacha palace coup.

Insecure, undemocratic or rigged elections are, therefore, a negation of the known basic democratic tenets and indeed a conclusive evidence of the absence of democracy (Igini, 2013). They are usually characterized by all forms of electoral malpractices and irregularities such as the manipulation of the laws and processes guiding the conduct of elections to suit particular outcomes and constraining the access of some participants particularly women and the resources at their disposal to reach voters for campaign purposes prior to election day, as well as stuffing of ballot boxes with ballot papers well

ahead of actual voting. Seizure of or hoarding of electoral materials; manipulation and fabrication of electoral results, and the use of law enforcement agencies to intimidate, maim, and disenfranchise eligible voters, as well as the killing of political opponents particularly vulnerable group like women on election day or before (Igini, 2013). In addition, to manipulating the post-election judiciary processes to obviate or distort just outcomes that should reflect the will of voters as expressed in the ballots are other forms of electoral fraud. Obviously, fundamental deficits inherent in Nigerian elections can be linked to factors related to security challenges or insecure election. Electoral insecurity breeds violence that undermines women participation in the electoral processes, which results in under-representation of women in elective positions.

The causes of Nigeria's manifold security deficiencies are rooted deep within the fabric of the state (government security structures such as the police) or non-state mechanisms (militant and terrorist groups) competing and overlapping each other. The most prominent have been the terrorist attacks by Islamist militant groups like Boko Haram, most notably in the north-eastern states of Yobe, Kano, Bauchi, Borno and Kaduna (Ajala and Müller, 2019). North Central Nigeria is engulfed with land resource contestation between farmers and herdsmen in the middle belt, in the geographical centre and in the south eastern region. In the South East and South South are the lingering longstanding conflict with the Biafran Separatist Movement that is fuelled by environmental problems due to the oil production. Those security challenges have forced millions of people to leave their ancestral home and change their modes of living, whether within the borders or beyond. Additionally, the absence of job opportunities for the teeming youths coupled with insufficient investments in health, education and power infrastructures further weaken the economic and social outlook for the inhabitants of the rest of the country. Unfortunately, the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) government could not initiate fundamental improvements of the living conditions for the population.

Violence and Women's Participation in Elections in Nigeria
Gender related violence is rooted in prescribed behaviour, norms and attitudes that define what it means to be a woman or a man and how men and women are positioned vis-à-vis one another. These norms define, allow and even encourage violent behaviour within environments that assign privilege and hierarchical power to certain groups of men. Gender related violence, therefore, is 'the enforcement of power hierarchies and structural inequalities created and sustained by belief systems, cultural norms and socialization processes' (Kamau and Nzomo, 2012). Understanding gender relations is therefore critical to knowing why women are being violated and ways to end violence against women.

In Nigeria, the dominant culture is patriarchal and gendered division of labour and power whereby men are traditionally and culturally legitimized as the head of the home. In some way, whatever treatment a man gives a woman even if violent especially within a family is endured and accepted. Women's role at best is considered primarily to support their male counterparts. When women want to go out of their way to do what is 'traditionally' seen as the men's domain, violence is then used by men as a means to

maintain their egos likewise to intimidate, subdue or control the women folk. Power inequality between women and men is therefore a prime cause of sexual and gender-related violence. Women's perceived subordinate social, economic and legal status in different settings often makes it difficult for them to get help once violence occurs.

The political scenario in Nigeria is known to be for the bold and tough people that can freely participate in active party politics (Ehinmore and Ehiabhi, 2011). Related to the above, it is generally difficult for women to swim in the murky waters of Nigerian politics (Charles and Ikenna, 2009). Fear of all forms of physical and non-physical violence is thus one of the reasons most cited by women political aspirants as their major obstacle in electoral politics. Furthermore, the branding of politics as a dirty game is yet another factor that discourages a lot of women from even attempting to join electoral politics. This thought alone can cause psychological violence to the women as their 'feminine' trait is characterized as being gentle, soft-spoken and motherly.

Gender related electoral violence is primarily directed to women as a result of their aspirations to seek political office, their link to political activities or simply their commitment to vote. Okumu (2008) referred to political violence against women as 'political rape'. From his perspective, political rape occurs when men subdue women due to their ego and when women try to get what traditionally or naturally is mostly acquired by the men, violence is used to intimidate or control them (Okumu, 2008). Some of them are pressured to step down in favour of a male candidate and could be victims of threats and physical violence. Though violence is equally used against male aspirants by their fellow men, they have greater effects on women aspirants.

Despite the fact that some political parties' constitutions and manifestos showed the inclusion of gender-friendly provisions, they are not well respected (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2011). In party primaries, women were not able to compete on a level playing field with their male counterparts. The 'do-or-die' nature of politics in Nigeria is hardly veiled and threats are made intermittently to warn opponents that when push comes to shove, the side with the monopoly of violence will carry the day. The spate of politically motivated killings has not helped matters especially in the historical trend of Nigeria as a democratic country. Looking at the trend of electoral violence in Nigeria, it is obvious that violence can be said to be a major cause of low political participation among women.

Security Challenges to 2019 General Elections
Nigeria's elections have historically been fraught with controversy, violence, and other abuses, with the 2015 elections, widely believed to have been largely free of violence, bucking this trend. However, this was not the case as the 2019 elections were marred by voter intimidation and violence at both the federal and state levels, including by armed men hired by candidates and political parties and by security forces, including the national police (Human Right Watch, 2019). The politically related violence reported in many states was in contrast to the relatively peaceful 2015 elections that brought Buhari into office 2015. The national and state elections in February, March, and April 2019 contributed to the

general insecurity across the country. According to a report by SBM Intelligence, 626 people were killed during the 2019 election cycle, starting with campaigns in 2018 (Human Right Watch, 2019).

The deaths and violence that trailed the 2019 elections left a sour taste in observers' mouths. Onwuka (2019) reported that while voting was still ongoing, media was awash with death of as many as 40 people. Different sources reported that as many as 30 people could have been killed in Rivers State, three in Kogi State; two in Bayelsa State; two in Delta State; and one in Oyo State. The dead included civilians shot by soldiers, political thugs, and politicians shot by political thugs and unknown assassins. One was an ad hoc electoral officer recruited from the National Youth Service Corps. However, the death that was most touching was that of the 19-year-old Daniel Usman, a student of Kogi State University, who was reportedly shot dead while voting for the first time. Hours before his death, he had made a post on Facebook which read "Vote and not fight! Respect Yourself and stay out of trouble… GOD BLESS NIGERIA" (Onwuka 2019: 2).

Human Right Watch (2019) reported that states like Bauchi, Benue, Kano, Sokoto, Plateau, and Rivers were particularly affected by violence during the March 9 gubernatorial elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission canceled elections in places where the elections were disrupted, and held supplementary elections later. Kano state had supplementary elections on March 23, and Rivers state on April 13. Kano and Rivers states were probably the worst hit of the six states identified by both local and international analysts ahead of the elections as holding great potential for electoral violence. Both are major political strongholds for the two leading political parties, Buhari's ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP). Abdullahi Ganduje of the APC won the 2019 election in Kano, and Nyesom Wike of the PDP won in Rivers state. In Lagos State, thugs invaded areas that are dominated by another ethnic group and destroyed electoral materials, telling the voters to go back to their states of origin to vote. In Akwa Ibom, electoral officers were abducted; many of them were members of the NYSC.

Worse still, the election period included persistent attacks by factions of the insurgent group Boko Haram in the northeast; increased communal violence between nomadic herdsmen and farmers spreading southward from north-central states; and a dramatic uptick in banditry, kidnapping, and killings in the northwestern states of Kaduna, Katsina, and Zamfara. Security forces have failed to respond effectively to threats to people's lives and security. The lack of meaningful progress in addressing the prevalent political violence, as well as lack of accountability for rights abuses, marked both the pre-election, elections day and post-election (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Human Rights Watch interviewed 32 people, including voters, journalists, election observers, activists, and Independent National Electoral Commission officials in Rivers and Kano states, and documented 11 deaths specifically related to violent interference in the election process during the February 23 presidential election and subsequent state elections. These killings and maiming of lives and destruction of property scare women away from participating in election.

Conclusion

The number of women representation in various elective offices since 2003 to 2019 has reflected declining women representation in Nigeria. While many countries across the globe are making conscious efforts to bridge inequalities between men and women in the political space, Nigeria has kept falling short even when women constitute almost half of the voting population. Women constitute 49.4 percent of Nigeria's population. Female political representation in the 2019 elections was negligible relative to the approximately half of the population they constitute. Out the 84 million registered voters that voted in the 2019 elections, women accounted for almost 40 million (47. 14 percent). Notwithstanding this population advantage, the total number of women elected into political offices keeps diminishing, with only 2,970 women on the electoral ballot, representing only 11.36 percent of nominated candidates. Worse still, of the 11.36 percent women that were successful at the primaries, only 4.2 percent were elected. This shows a shortfall of 1.5 percent from 5.7 percent political representation attained by women in 2015 elections. Several factors have been adduced for this shortfall. Notably, the quest by men to hold onto power at all cost remains a factor that downplays the quest for gender inclusiveness in political processes. To maintain the status quo, they employed the instrument of violence.

    For instance, in party primaries, women were not able to compete on a level playing field with their male counterparts. The 'do-or-die' nature of politics in Nigeria is hardly veiled and threats are made intermittently to warn opponents that when push comes to shove, the side with the monopoly of violence will carry the day. The spate of politically motivated killings has not helped matters especially in the historical trend of Nigeria as a democratic country. Election related violence as a result of insecurity attacks the very soul and heart of modern day representative democracy which has resulted in restricted, inactive and low participation of the citizenry particularly women in the decision making process of the political system. Though this ugly and frightening phenomenon is a bane to full and active participation of Nigerians in the electoral process, women because of the socio-biological and traditional make-up is the worse victims of election related violence. Looking at the trend of electoral insecurity in Nigeria, it is obvious that violence can be said to be a major cause of low political participation among women.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been put forward (a) The federal government should demonstrate political will to bring Nigeria at par with other countries that have achieved 30 percent affirmative right action for women in political representation through the instrument of legislation. Sound legislation remains the best way to achieve the 35 percent affirmative action for women. For instance, in Senegal, legislation was used to achieve 30 percent affirmative action for women before the move for parity (50:50). With legislation, political parties can be compelled to reserve

specific quotas for women since it is the only platform through which candidates can aspire to political offices.

(b) It is also imperative that women advocate groups change their approach of begging males for palliative such as appointive positions to vigorously championing the need for amendment of relevant sections of the laws that will create a favourable environment for more women involvement in the elective and representative politics of the Nigerian state. They should learn from the experience of their counterparts in Uganda and Rwanda, two African countries where women fought and achieved increased women's representation by making their governments adopt a proportional representative electoral system, which is more conducive to women's representation in political decision making. (c) Electoral security is a sine-quo-non for gender inclusive and participatory election. Government must device effective ways of nipping in the bud issues of insecurity before, during and after elections. The security agents must be proactive in securing electoral actors and materials before, during and after elections. They must also maintain absolute neutrality in election matters.

(d) The National Assembly should take a second look at the Electoral Act as it concerns punishment for electoral violence with the view to giving it more bite. Section 98 of the 2010 Electoral Act which stipulates the punishment for offences listed on Section 97 of the same Act is too lenient on offenders, and thus needs to be amended to reflect a weightier punishment. It is high time election offenders are made to face the full consequences of their offences in the most deterrent way. The culture of impunity in the legal system and law enforcement agencies as a result of their inability to arrest, prosecute, and convict offenders involved in violence against women encourages sexual crimes and other forms of violence.

(e) The civil society represented by several civil society organisations (CSOs) especially women's rights advocate groups must enlighten and mobilize Nigerians and the Nigerian political system to put in place stiff electoral laws that will make electoral fraud and violence, a heinous crime against the citizenry and state. If there is going to be any hope for a more female gender friendly political environment as a platform for sustainable democracy in Nigeria, politicians found guilty of electoral fraud and violence as well as all those that benefitted from it one way or the other should no longer be treated with kid gloves and palliatives. They must be made to face stringent and long lasting penalties and sanctions. It is hoped that this measure will serve as deterrence against any form of political lawlessness and violence as well as creating a more conducive and gender friendly environment for full and active involvement of women in the decision making process of the Nigerian state.

(f) Without prejudice to the earlier recommendations, putting a platform for resolving pending issues in Nigeria and for advancing the course of post conflict peace building can help to make the political environment peaceful and therefore suitable for female participation in politics in Nigeria. As Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013) earlier argued, post conflict peace building is not only necessary but need to technically undertaken to avert further resurgences and escalation of tensed situations in the society.

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