Gender And Politics: A Study of Women Participation/Representation in Legislative & Executive Arm in Nigeria 2011-2019

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Abstract

The advent of globalization increased the clamor for gender representation and participation globally. However, Nigeria politics from post-colonial period till present is male dominated. Despite such efforts like the Beijing World conference on women participation in politics and the National Gender Policy (NGP) recommendation of 35% affirmative action of women both in elective and appointive positions, women yet lack adequate political representation in Nigeria. This study therefore examines the nexus between political participation and representation of women in legislative and executive arms of government between 2011-2019. The study made use of documentary method of data collection relying heavily on texts, journals, gender reports on women participation in politics like UN-Women annual gender report 2011, UNESCO priority gender equality action plan 2014-2021, INEC publications on gender and political participation in Nigeria 2011-2019, National Gender policy framework etc. The method of data. analysis used in this study is content analysis through a detailed explanations of tables used in this study. The theory of sexism was adopted to justify the level of women participation in Nigeria politics. Though from the findings, there is an indication that the participation of women in politics is prospective while there is no adequate representation in politics. Hence, with the leverage of appointments, women can be significantly represented in public offices. Therefore, this study recommends that, relevant stakeholders should advocate and review the existing legislation on gender participation to accommodate the growing interest of women in politics both in elective and appointive positions.

KEYWORDS: Gender, Political representation, political participation.

Introduction

Irrespective of constituting above half of the world's population, women's political participation which seems undertone in our patriarchic society has drawn several attentions owing to the significant roles of women in our socio-economic and political activities. These roles are not limited to household responsibilities, but transcend to the threshold of leadership roles where women crave for proper representation in the public sphere and in the decisions that affects them as members of a society. This clamor for women participation and representation in politics can be traced to the beginning of the twentieth century which ushered in so many socio-economic and political transformations and saw the paradigm shift of women from the household to the public spheres. Anifowose (2004) observed that in some other countries like Nigeria, some roles like home managers, community organizers, and socio-cultural and political activist are among the five key roles of women in society thereby projecting that quest for administrative or political inclusion. Fortunately, Sub-Saharan African countries have witnessed emergence of women in politics like Liberia, Malawi, Central African Republic etc (Shamin & Kumari, 2002), yet global representation of women in politics needs attention.

Again, the wave of globalization which incorporates and emphasizes the issues of democratization, women and human rights that dominates the world interests and Africa in particular contributes to this call. Viz- the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on the promotion of gender equality and the UNDP Report of 2004 which highlighted non-gender specific roles and incorporation of women in decision making process(Food & Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FOA], 2022). In lieu of this the World Economic Forum (2018) Global Gender Gap report measures 'political empowerment' in terms of the ratios of women to men in ministerial and parliamentary positions. The report showed that out of a total of 149 countries, Nigeria is ranked as having the 139th largest gender gap in 'political empowerment'. Consequently, Nigeria is yet to bridge the wide chasm in women political empowerment and participation.

On the relevance of women representation in politics, Dovi (2006) provides seven arguments why female representatives are necessary. They include; the role model argument, the justice argument, the trust argument, the increase participation argument,

the legitimacy argument, the transformative argument, and the overlooked interest's argument. According to her, "*The role model argument contends that having female representatives improves female citizens' self-esteem. The justice argument contends that fairness demands that men and women be present in roughly equal numbers in the political arena…. The trust argument focuses on the past betrayals of historically disadvantaged groups by privileged groups…, The legitimacy argument contends that the perceived legitimacy of democratic institutions varies with the number of representatives from historically disadvantaged groups… The transformative argument contends that the presence of women allows democratic institutions to live up to their ideals… then the overlooked interest's argument suggests that democratic deliberations and political agendas can be improved by having female representatives in public office* (Dovi, 2006). These roles also affirm the indispensable functions of women in the society beyond the household level. From the above arguments on the indispensable necessity of women representation in politics, one can infer that there are elements of freedom and paradigm shift from the usual home managerial roles of women to the public sphere of a voice that needs inclusion in decision making.

At present, there is a significant increase in the global growth of women parliamentarians in 2020 as shown in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU's) annual report on Women in Parliament from 24.9 per cent to 25.5 percent (IPU, 2021). That notwithstanding, the current political climate of Nigeria is not an enabler to the attainment of the 35% affirmative women representation as purported by National Gender Policy (NGP) given that few women are running for elected office (Oluyemi, 2016). Also, a study by the BBC (2015) on gender gaps in political knowledge revealed that (13%) political knowledge, (5%) political discussion and participation (16%) are results of women interests in politics therein results to low women participation and representation in politics(Kelly, 2019). It is against the above explanations that this study sets out to examine the level of political participation/representation of women in legislative and executive arm in Nigeria politics.

Conceptual clarification: Gender; women participation vs representation.

The concept of gender has numerous definitions. According to United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (1997) gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female, the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, and the relations between women and between men are referred to as gender. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women

and men (femininity and masculinity) (UNESCO, 1997). From the above definition, gender does not necessarily refer to female roles only rather to the roles of both sexes in a society judging from their physical attributes and characteristics. However, owing to the patriarchic nature of Nigeria politics, issue of gender is more akin to a fair and adequate representation of women in decision making process.

On the other hand, such concepts like political participation and political representation are used interchangeably in this study. However, the thin lines are identified in their explanations. Accordingly, Isaksson et al. (2014) and Kelly (2019) observed that Political participation includes voting; work on election campaigns, engagement in the community, and contact with political leaders and attendance at demonstrations. Casserly (2016) added that it involves an organised effort to solve a problem; take part in a march or demonstration or participate in local meetings', as well as voting. Consequently, Political participation from the above definitions includes variables like voting in elections and contesting for elective/public offices.

This is quite different from representation. Political representation involves inherent approach to maintain gender balance in public offices through appointments of special assistants, directors and aides to ensure the relevance of women in politics. Representation is basically entailing elective/public offices. For instance, there may be increase of votes cast by women in elections which reflects increase in participation. On the contrary, when the number of women holding public offices are relatively low when compared to men it reflects under-representation. Therefore, to maintain a relative gender balance, issues of appointment of women to head some public offices becomes relevant.

Methodology and Theoretical framework

This study made use of documentary method of data collection relying heavily on secondary sources like UN-Women annual gender report 2011, UNESCO priority gender equality action plan 2014-2021, INEC publications on gender and political participation in Nigeria 2011-2019, National Gender policy framework, Journals etc. Content analysis was used to analyze the data gathered owing to the consistency of the variable "gender" as found in the relevant literatures. Ex post facto research design was used as the framework

of explaining the level of women participation and representation in Nigeria politics between 2011-2019. The study adopted the theory of sexism to interrogate and justify issues of gender and politics in reference to women participation and representation in Nigeria. Sexism is the attitude and institutions, often unconscious, that judge human worthy on the grounds of gender or sex roles or it could be prejudice or discrimination, against women based on their genders. The proponents of this theory include Karl Marx, Peter Glick, Susan Fsike, and Mary Anstell (Uwa et al., 2018). Its basic tenets include: Fundamental, physical and psychological differences between men and women, in part, account for the ascribed masculine supremacy and paternity in the societies (Uwa et al., 2018): Cultures and societies are deciders of gender roles. Consequently, these identifies features of sexism theory are not farfetched in the Nigeria political environment of which women are always dominated and plays the second role.

Women representation/participation in Nigerian politics: (legislative and executive arms of government)

Studies on women representation/participation in Nigeria politics with particular reference to the legislative and executive arms of government have revealed that, apart from the slight increase between 1999 and 2007, from an average of 2.3% across both houses of legislature to 7.8%, it had stopped by 2011. In addition to this, Kelly L. (2019) observed that Nigeria has low rates of female representation in politics by global and regional standards. In similar vein, the statistics of the 2015 election showed that 20 women out of 359 is in its lower house (5.6%) and 7 out of 109 is in its upper house (6.4%) putting Nigeria at 180th position in the world with regards to women participation and representation in politics(Women in National Parliament, 2019). Again, another report by (National Centre for Women Development [NCWD], (2016), suggests that the number of women serving as ministers and appointed executives is also very low, with 11 of the 636 appointed executives between 1999 and 2015 being women (17.5%) and 15% of ministers in the same period. Consequently, this has necessitated the Nigeria Women Trust Fund (NWTF, 2019) to urge the presidency to prioritize women representation in the executive arm revealing that the 2019 general elections indicated that women make up 7.3% of the Nigerian Senate and 3.1% of the House of Representatives while no women state governors (NWTF, 2019). All these infer the low representation of women in Nigeria politics. In

addition, a Nigerian government statistical report shows that in the years 1999-2015, 6% of councilors (local government) were women, 24% of judges in the federal court were women, and an average of 7% of each type of high-level government officials and senior administrators were women (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2018). Unfortunately, the political party system also has not done much to encourage women participation. In 2015, of 760 candidates for the positions of governor and deputy, only 87 were women (11.45%). Also, the 747 candidates for senator, only 122 were women (16.33%), and the 1,774 candidates for the House of Representatives, only 269 were women (15.16%) (NWTF, 2015). Even with the affirmative action of 35% representation of women in political and non-elective positions in Nigeria, the number of women in the legislative houses is not encouraging as a result of the patriarchal dominance of the men in Nigeria. Member of House of Representative was 26 (7.2 per cent) in 2011, in 2015 the number of women in the House of representative decrease to 19 (5.3 per cent) out of 360 members 20/360 in 2019 elections (Oluyemi, 2016). The table below shows the percentage of women that contested for posts in the elections of 2011/2015.

Number of Women that contested for 2011 and 2015 general elections

| Office | 2011 | | 2015 | |
	Seat available	Women	Seat available	Women
President	1	0	1	0
Vice.President	1	0	1	0
Senate	109	7 (6.4)	109	8 (6.8)
House of Rep.	360	26 (7.2)	360	19 (5.3)
Governor	36	0	36	0
Dep. Governor	36	3(8.3)	36	4
State house	990	62 (6.3)		
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L.G Chairman	740			
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Councilors	6368			
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Also In 2019, female political representation was negligible. A total of 2,970 women were on the electoral ballot representing only 11.36% of nominated candidates (Onyeji, 2019). The table below shows the female elected candidates in the 2019 general elections.

Position	Total no. of candidates	Number of positions	Number of women	%	Total elected
President	73	1	6	8.22	0
V. President	73	1	22	30.13	0
Senate	1,904	109	235	12.34	7
House of Rep.	4,680	360	533	11.39	11
Governor	2,412	36	74	3.07	0
Dep. Governor	2,412	36	275	11.49	4
State house	14,583	944	1,825	12.51	40
Total	26,137	1,487	2,870	11.36	62

From the above table on the number of women that contested for the 2019 general elections [legislative and executive arm including the 36 states of the federation], it revealed that while seven (7) women were elected into the Senate during the 2019 elections, the House of representatives had 11 women elected into its chamber. Also, a breakdown of women representation in the executive and legislative arm across the 36 states of the federation reveals that, while four (4) women were elected as deputy governors, 40 women out of 944 available positions grabbed the positions of lawmakers into the 36 state Houses of Assembly. Consequently, Nigeria lacks a formal effective quota system, which in certain contexts can serve as a mechanism through which to increase women's political participation in Nigeria. However, a critical look on the approach through which women can be elected into either legislative or executive arm can be hinged on the powers of appointment by the chief executive. No doubt, women are dissuaded and constrained from active political participation owing to the prevalence of violence in Nigerian politics, the high costs of running a campaign, and a climate of socio-cultural and religious conservatism. Having observed these limitations to women participation in Nigerian politics, women can be significantly represented in the helm of government affairs through the veto power of appointment into various political positions as given to the chief executive by the 1999 constitution as amended. With this, women can be appointed into the position of ministers (federal), commissioners (state), and other decision-making positions thereby improving significantly the level of women representation in decision making process. Unfortunately, Ifendu (2019) observed that in President Muhammadu

Buhari's new cabinet, only 7 women made the cut, making up a little above 16% of the federal ministers. Therefore, for a country where over 90m people, are women, such under-representation should trigger a concerted collaborative effort of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other major stake holders to address adequate gender representation in public/elective offices for women especially as a member of the society and in decisions that matters to them.

Limitations to effective participation of women in Nigeria politics.

Over time, researchers have shown that there are numerous factors that limit the effective participation women in Nigeria politics. They include the following:

Traditional, Ethnic and Religious beliefs.

Traditional, ethnic and religious beliefs are among the factors that hamper effective participation of women in Nigeria politics. Odiaka (2019) observed that irrespective of national gender policy and increase in girls' school enrolment particularly in the northern part of the country, which in the past has seen a high rate of neglect and discrimination toward women, there is still significant gender disparity when it comes to labour force participation in government. This can be attributed to cultural norms, discriminatory laws and other factors such as women's child care and family commitments. Olunyemi (2015) noted that in late December 2015, Nigeria's top Muslim cleric called on lawmakers to reject a bill currently under debate in the National Assembly that would allow women the right to inherit family wealth and property saying it goes against the teachings of the Quran efforts of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other major stake holders that crave for gender and women participation in Nigeria politics. Again, the recent Supreme Court verdict on the right for women inheritance in Igbo cultural setting has equally proven that traditional belief also affects the level of women participation in politics.

Patriarchy

Gender stereotypes are common in the Nigerian political sphere. In 2016, Senator Abiodun Olujimi proposed the Gender Equality Bill, but it did not pass a second reading as

opponents rejected it as an attack on religious beliefs and the Nigerian constitution (Iroanusi, 2019). Although as expected of patriarchal societies, gender violence and subjugation push women to the margin of not wielding political power however, few examples like Remi Sonaiya (Presidential Candidate KOWA Party), Lolo Ceicilia Ezeilo (Deputy Governor, Enugu State), Uche Ekwunife (Anambra Senatorial District) among few others have countered the narrative, though slow and sluggish. Another encounter with the patriarchal nature of Nigeria politics was in 2015 when Remi Sonaiya was the only and first woman to contest for the presidential seat in Nigeria. Not minding that a sizable number of the Nigerian population were vehemently against her running yet she got 13, 076 out of 28, 587, 564 valid votes (Agency report, 2018)

Towards encouraging more women participation/representation in the politics of Nigeria.

The Nigeria state's response to the history of electoral violence has been to increasingly militarize elections processes. It has now become standard practice to have heavy security presence deployed to various polling units across the country, including police, military and secret police. These have implications for women's participation, both as electorate and candidates. Given that women remain the primary caregivers in the family, many women are disinclined to participate in elections with such an obvious potential for violence.

According to the National Democratic Institute's report 2018, legislating and enforcing laws to prevent, protect, and respond to political violence against women is key to increasing women's political participation, especially in Nigeria's violence-prone elections. Political violence against women describes threats and acts of violence against women candidates and voters during electoral campaigns as well as strategic efforts aimed at discouraging women from participating and influencing women's pattern of participation during voting. In addition, Wuya (2021) observed that violence and intimidation of both voters and candidates during elections has been a huge constraint to women's participation in politics. For example, the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), which monitored the 2015 Nigerian elections, had difficulty recruiting women monitors due to their fear of violence in certain regions, particularly the north.

Again, quotas for women in parliament, government and political parties have the potential to improve women's representation and have been shown to be effective in other Sub-Saharan African countries (Quadri, 2018). According to Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC, 2018) report, it argues that efforts to increase representation have failed because most observers have misdiagnosed the problem. It argues that focusing on 'expanding women's political resources' such as education, networks and mentoring, have produced only 'incremental change'. Women are prominent in Nigerian business and civil society, including activists more than political representation thus, cultural restrictions are being eroded, yet these achievements are not being matched in politics.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study examined women participation/representation in legislative and executive arm of government in Nigeria between 2011-2019. From the foregoing explanations, if effective women political participation becomes cumbersome, with the leverage of appointments by the president women can be represented in public offices to a significant extent. Again, this study explored some factors militating against women participation in Nigerian Politics. It is pertinent to note that, the number of women elected into public offices in Nigeria have not significantly increased after the 2019 general election as shown by the analyses of this study. One of the major reasons include socio- cultural discrimination from the men folk, both in choosing, voting for candidates and in allocating political offices.

More often than not, men constitute a larger percentage of the party membership and this tends to affect women when it comes to selecting or electing candidates for elections. Since men are usually the majority in the political party setup, they tend to dominate the party hierarchy and are therefore at advantage in influencing the party's internal politics. Women usually constitute a smaller percentage of political party membership because of the cultural and religious attitudes of different Nigerian societies that tend to relegate women to the background. In Northern Nigeria, for instance, an important factor inhibiting women's participation is the house seclusion of women. It is against this backdrop that the study put up the following recommendations**:**

- As the Electoral Act has regulations on campaign financing, the study suggests that private sector actors and development agencies can play a support role for women candidates, who typically do not have adequate resources to finance their candidacy throughout the electoral cycle. This could be done through an equitable process that allows women to tender their proposals to businesses looking to support women's political participation at the local, state, or national levels.

- Secondly, Women themselves need to work together like their predecessors by championing a common front and working towards achieving success. They need to help one another, be there for each other in other to hasten their "dream of gender equality.

- In reference to a study using time-series data from 20 countries with varying levels of women's participation gathered in the Afro barometer survey, increased representation of women will increase women's engagement in politics. That is to say, the need for advocating for quotas to improve women's representation and engagement are very important rather than waiting for social change (Burchard & Barnes, 2012)

- Finally, as the next elections draws near, and with each political party strategizing on ways of winning, making gender parity a reality should start through the practice of internal democracy. The achievement of gender parity at party level will automatically ease the way for women in any position they want. It should be part of the manifestoes of the various political parties.

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