Trends in Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the developments and trends of women's political participation in Africa in general, with specific reference to Nigeria. It relied on secondary sources of data and content analysis. Using an eclectic approach of a four tied theoretical discourse: Liberal feminist theory, Radical feminist theory, Cultural determinism theory and Functionalist theory. The study argues, The study observed that cultural factors like socio-cultural beliefs, attitudes, biases, stereotypes and patriarchy emphasizes the superiority of men and the inferiority. Also, lack of financial banking and the political factors of threats and violence-laced politics made a still a wide gap in women's political participation when compared with men. To take Nigeria out of this debacle the study concluded that stakeholders must assume responsibility in accepting the underrepresentation of women politically as gross discrimination. It recommended that gender-sensitive laws, policies, programmes and budgets based on a thorough understanding of the multifaceted issues that affect women should be considered in making electoral laws and the society should consciously advance policies that empowers women financially, electoral body – INEC – should implement, monitor and evaluate policies and programmes saddled with these tasks.

Introduction

… progress in gender equality remains slow in all structures of power and types of decision-making. Power is still firmly in men's hands, and although we have witnessed some positive trends … much remains to be done if women are to play on a level field with men.

(Martin Chungong, Inter-Parliamentary Union's Secretary General, 2017).

Women's political participation is an important requirement for gender equality and good governance. Expectedly, in all facets and at all stages of the political process, both men and women should have equal rights and opportunities for participation. However, the reality is that women face challenges and the number of women in leadership and decision

making positions remains extremely low. Although, the nineteenth century heralded the right to vote at elections and be voted for, where gender equality in political participation is globally acknowledged to be central to modern democratic governance, women's political participation pales in comparison to that of their male counterparts (Amadiume, 1997:8; Bruce, 2004:113; Babatunde, 2003; Bari, 2005). Besides trailing behind in the political realm, women's "involvement or participation in government structures and the process of democracy still remains low" (Ocran, 2014; 3). Globally, women share the common feature of being marginalized from public life (Igbuzor, 2011; Anaeme; 2012; Okrie, 2016; Irabor, 2012; Fapohunda, 2012). Though the measure of marginalization varies, the construction of the political space is a direct confrontation to women's political participation. This comes at such a time when women's political participation is a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and genuine democracy (Pogoson, 2018).

The emerging trends in women's political participation have been demonstrated by women making important advances in world politics characterized by increase in the number of women joining political parties and participating actively in national politics and increase in the number of women in some national parliaments and leadership positions. Women appear to have broken the political "glass ceiling" in some countries with a varied mixture of social, economic, cultural, and political characteristics (Farida & Mona, 2010). Nevertheless, attaining significant gender equality in politics remains largely inaccessible to women. Women continue to experience considerable discrimination related to their participation in public and political life in most areas of public life and across all regions. In most countries, women vote in equal, or greater numbers than men but continue to trail behind men in the political process. Whether as political party members, candidates running for elected offices, or vying for leadership positions as cabinet ministers and heads of government and state, this situation persists (OSCE/ODIHR, 2014), regardless of the guarantee in most national constitutions of equal rights for women, and a number of several international frameworks and instruments targeted at ending all forms of discrimination against women. The reasons for the under-representation of women in power and decision-making are multidimensional and complex. Noteworthy, barriers to women's involvement in public and political life emanate from economic, social and cultural issues, as well as from and importunate deep-rooted gender roles and incessant negative stereotypes about women.

Accordingly, with Nigeria as its spatial scope, the study adopted a descriptive research design. Through a qualitative method of data collection, the it relied on secondary sources and observation of contemporary pattern of women's political participation. Against the backdrop of global developments, this study highlights developments and trends in women's political participation in Africa in general with specific reference to Nigeria. It

also analyzes factors that aided these trends, highlights the barriers to women's participation and makes recommendations to improve women's participation in politics.

Theoretical Perspectives of Women's Political Participation

The depth of political participation, informed Milbraith and Goel (1977), affirmation that political participation involves both ceremonial and support activities. Van Deth (2001) reiterates this when he asserted, that political participation may be the study of everything. According to the Oxford Research Encyclopedia (2016), as an indispensable feature of democracy, political participation is a voluntary action and non-professional activity centered on government, politics or the state. Basically, political participation is the involvement of citizens in the formulation and implementation of policies for their governance; their participation in the choice of their leaders, the right to participate in political leadership; and the ability to influence the political process once elected. The extent of women's participation in any country is influenced by a wide range of factors comprising the overall drive towards attaining "equality of rights and opportunities among women and men in public and private spheres, the choice of political and electoral systems, and the level of institutionalization of and transparency in decision-making processes within political parties" (OSCE/ODIHR, 2014). **As** Bleck and Michelitch (2018), states, the social and political disempowerment of women compared to men has implications on the advancement of political awareness and efficacy.

Globally, progress has been made in most regions regarding these elements of political participation. However, as in the case of most African states, like Nigeria, it is a case of onestep forward, two steps backward. **Orisadare (2019), argues that** although members of women group movements accept appointments, and also enjoy government patronage, **the absence of a political agenda and the prevalence of conflicting goals with any political agenda, bears the crux of women's political participation. Accordingly, where sharp** divergent preferences between men and women exist, depressed participation by women leads to an under-representation of their interests (Gottlieb, Grossman & Robinson, 2016).

In the light of this, there are several theories elucidating trends and challenges in women's political participation globally. An eclectic approach of a four tied theoretical discourse: Liberal feminist theory, Radical feminist theory, Cultural determinism theory and Functionalist theory, guides the position of this paper. The liberal feminist theory questions the low participation of women, basing its inferences on women been equal and rational beings like men who has the legal right to compete favourably with their male counterparts. Arguing, that women's personal autonomy i.e living in a live of one's own choice and political autonomy is dependent on certain enabling conditions like social

arrangements which society fails to observe or respect (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2013)

Similarly, radical feminist theory admits, that there would be developmental consequences in contemporary world, due to the lack of female participation. Again, this low participatory level of women is an inefficient use of human resource (Cathy, 2012). For the radical feminists, the major challenge of women's political participation is the patriarchal social construction, as such, radical feminist opposes patriarchy in its entirety. Jone Lewis (2019) opines, that advocates of this theory tend to dismantle patriarchy in its entirety through legal procedures rather than reframing the system to be more flexible in political and social engineering that has failed to upturn the existing order which perpetually puts the women in a disadvantaged point. The cultural determinism theorists anchored on culture, connotes that culture is the main driving force which defines the appropriate forms of behaviours for both men and women; and this differ from society to society. In effect, culture defines one's personality and not biological traits (Singh, 2019). Situating this argument within African context, it is important to note that the cultural practices among the various parts of the continent does not give women equal opportunity into the decision-making arena, majorly, because of the prevalence of patriarchy. Consequently, to make up for the short falls of the cultural determinism theory, the functionalist theory is capable of zeroing in on the complementary role of women in institutional and national policies of government to maximize social efficiency. In other words, this theory submits that, gender inequalities occur to enhance a gender balanced social system (Libretext, 2019). Focusing on the African society of which women are a critical part of, these theories provide basis for understanding trends in women political participation and the factors informing these trends.

From the above theoretical groundings, the role of women in political participation is essential to national development. **As Robinson & Gottlieb (2021) avers,** successful outcomes for women is embedded in its potential to influence and motivate more progressive standards toward gender roles in the society. More so, consequent on the role of women's groups in political dispensation, it enhances equity, equality, and economic development (Orisadare, 2019).

Forms of Women's Political Participation

Many discourse on women's political participation have tended towards one level of political participation, thereby de-emphasizing the role of other levels in informing women's participation in political matters. Unarguably, the gladiator level is the most common, but the transitional and subject levels of political participation are covertly more instrumental to women's influence in politics. According to Verba, Schlozman, and Brady

(1995), only about 3 percent of the adult population holds an elected or appointed public office, thereby leaving the remaining 97% of adult population to other level of political participation. In other words, both overtly and covertly, every citizen partakes in one form of political function or the other, which is the effective exercise of citizenship, what Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) refers to as actions influencing distribution of social goods and values.

Political participation is principally to enable democracy, encourage citizen's engagement with political actors and institutions as well as influence government's policies. Hence there are several levels of achieving this objective. For instance, people can vote representatives based on their preference for certain social programs and welfare schemes to which they can benefit from. Milbraith (1965), categorized political participation into three main forms, the Gladiator; which contest for elections and eventually hold political positions, the transitional level, that involves attending political parties meeting, contributing to party fund etc and the spectator level which focuses on activities, such as voting, influencing voting behaviours and pattern, as well as joining political rallies and discussions. At different scales, political participation includes voting, involvement in election campaigns, engagement in grassroots politics through interaction with local political representatives, attending political meetings, rally or protest, signing petitions, public debate, contributing to political discussions and participation in an Internet forum or social media network.

Although International norms suggests that men and women have an equal right to participate fully in all aspects of the political process but this is often not the case, as women are often more likely to face political barriers to effective participation influenced by lack of financial resources, lower levels of education, inadequate access to information, domestic family responsibilities, and a patriarchal environment. According to a study on gender gaps in political participation across selected Sub-Saharan African Nations by Hilde and Catherine (2011), there appears significant gender gap in voters registration and eventual voting, with women less likely to vote and, women less likely to contact political institutions and politicians. Significantly, men, are more likely than women to engage in collective forms of participation (e.g., a demonstration) or to directly contact a politician Coffé & Bolzendahl, (2010). Hern (2018), in reiterating Hilde & Catherine's assertion after seven years confirms, that women are less likely than men to participate politically in Africa, where the gap is visible at all levels of political participation. From attending meetings, voting at elections to holding political office, women are more passive in political activities. However, Hern unlike most contributors of women's political participation in Africa, submits that attributing poverty and patriarchy alone to women's passivity in politics is limited. Owing that the Senegal experience, shows that a high quota system and

government's demonstration of support for women spiked an increased participation politically from women.

As such, at all levels of political participation in Africa, women are less likely to engage in politics due to poor access to resources and empowerment drivers. Consequently, whether economically empowered or not, Burns, Schlozman & Verba (1997) submits that, women are more likely to be burdened with house and care work, thereby placing further demands on their time and resources, with inadequate time for political activities. Interestingly, the media has taken a classical stage in influencing women's political participation in Africa, with the social media playing a crucial role in bridging the unavailability of economic resources and time to engage politically.

In effect, on social media, women and men have equal accessibility (Patterson, 2016). Consequently, "the motherhood penalty—a term used by sociologists to describe the job-related disadvantages faced by mother's relative to non-mothers, does not apply to female politicians' social media use. Respondents with dependent children were as active on social media as those of comparable age without children" (Patterson, 2016:11). The significance of social media has opened up new possibilities for citizens to engage with each other and with their political representatives, and contribute towards an inclusive and broad-based political process in Africa, such as the Arab spring uprising (Chatora, 2012) however, the major challenge is transforming these voices in decision making and online advocacy into systemic policy output in Africa and beyond (Loiseau & Nowacka, 2015). Significantly, applicable examples of social media platforms across Africa, where women have tended to influence government, reflects on election campaign, as well as protests and demonstration, such as the #Bringbackourgirlscampaign. Social media appear to present more benefits, especially as regards to swift, fast and less difficulties in disseminating information when compared to traditional mass media. Social media have been a veritable point of political campaigns and political discourse, especially during elections. In Nigeria, this vantage point has not entirely translated to the active participation of more women in politics and political discourse. Most women and politically inclined females have not engaged politics actively from the realm of social media handles as it benefits suggest, due to lack of internet access, as a result of socio-economic factors, power failure and cultural bias limiting women's online presence politically. However, the tide seems to be changing, as more women within the last 12 months are adjusting. This cannot be disassociated from the Covid-19 stay at home protocol and the end-sars movement, which produced more women in the heart of the political unrest. Groups like the feminist coalition and personalities like Aisha Yusuf brazened more women for political discourse using social media handles like facebook, whatsapp, and twitter etc. Howbeit, social media in Africa, appears to attract more active

female participants especially the young and literate public, and thereby shrinking the gender gap.

More than the gladiator form of political participation, women in Africa are increasingly influencing their political space through a myriad of ways, thereby contributing to their communities and being active members of society to influence the outcome of political issues.

Women and Political Participation: A Review of Global, Regional and National Frameworks

Women's representation or inclusion in political participation is a global phenomenon. Realizing that women abysmal level of participation in the decision-making arena is a global issue, several attempts have been made to address or minimize the widening gap between women and men most especially in the political landscape with the equation favouring the male counterparts. In order to assuage this gap, several frameworks and instruments have been promulgated.

The first major step of the United Nations (UN), was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, were it was agreed among states that, all human rights should be respected irrespective of race, colour, sex, language, religion, nationality or social origin, property, birth or tribe, and religion, cultural and political affiliations and other status. In other words, all human being have certain fundamental rights that should not be curtailed or abused. One of such rights is political right, that is, the right to take part in the governance process of his/her country without being discriminated, excluded and deprived upon. This milestone declaration has become a locus point or benchmark by which we measure respect for human right across the globe. For instance, according to Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood''. Also, Article 21(1) of same UDHR states that, 'Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.' The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) poised toward addressing the lacuna between men and women in the political front adopted the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) on 19 December 1966.

Another internationally recognized instrument or document that is targeted towards ending all forms of discriminations, including specifically discrimination against women, is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 that was adopted by the UNGA in its resolution 34/180 of 18th

December, entry into force September 3rd, 1981. In fact, CEDAW has often been described as an 'international bill of rights' for women as it recognized the abysmal participation of women in the political sphere.

Again, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, addressed one critical area of concern, that is, the advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men. In the conference it was agreed that, empowerment of women and equality between women and men are prerequisites for achieving political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security amongst all peoples. That is, achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. In fact, some of the strategic objectives and actions of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is the calling on Governments, the international community and civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector to take strategic action in the following critical areas of concern. One of such areas is balancing the growing divide between men and women in all levels of decision-making.

In Africa, several attempts have been made in addressing the inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels. For instance, the African Union (AU) promised or agreed to function in accordance with the certain principles. One of such principles as stated in Article 4(L) is, 'promotion of gender equality'. Also, article 4(m) further reaffirmed the need to, 'respect for democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law and good governance.' The Union therefore, in Article 9(1) states that, 'states parties shall take specific positive action to promote participative governance and the equal participation of women in the political life of their countries through affirmative action, enabling national legislation and other measures to ensure that:

- Women participate without any discrimination in all elections;
- Women are represented equally at all levels with men in all electoral processes; and
- Women are equal partners with men at all levels of development and implementation of state policies and development programmes

The AU further reinforced its commitment to the promotion of gender equality by instituting the African Gender Policy (AGP). The African Union Gender Policy is regarded as first of its kind in the continent. This document further reinforced the global and regional commitments on gender and women's empowerment. The main driving force behind the AU's Gender Policy (GP) is to ensure gender equality, gender justice, non-

discrimination and fundamental human rights in Africa. In other words, the Gender Policy is aimed at bridging the equality gap between men and women thereby enhancing or giving room for women to meaningfully contribute their quota to national development which were hitherto neglected by member states.

Understanding Women's Participation in Politics and Governance

Globally, women have made significant gains in politics and governance. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, women's visibility in public life has grown. In 1995, women represented 11.3 per cent of all parliamentarians, by 2018, they represented 24 per cent -- the highest percentage in history (IPU, 2018). Rwanda has the highest number of women parliamentarians worldwide with 67.5% per cent of seats in the lower house (The New Times, 2018). In other areas of government, although women still do not occupy half of all positions of executive and legislative leadership, an examination of global trends suggests that women appear to have broken the political "glass ceiling" in countries with diverse social, economic, cultural, and political features (Jalalzai & Krook, 2010). Not only are more women demanding to be heard and seeking to ensure that women's voices were counted in decision-making processes, most notably, globally, women sought to be among the world's leaders.

These gains notwithstanding, globally, women account for less than 10 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses in 29 states as of November 2018. Four chambers have no women at all (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2018). Regionally, wide gaps exist in the average percentages of women parliamentarians as indicated in table 1 below:

Table 1: Women in Parliament: Regional Averages

	Single House or lower House	**Upper House or Senate**	**Both Houses combined**
Nordic countries	**42.5%**	---	---
Americas	**30.6%**	31.3%	30.7%
Europe (Nordic countries included)	**28.6%**	28.0%	28.5%
Europe (Nordic countries not included)	**27.2%**	28.0%	27.4%

Sub-Saharan Africa	**23.9%**	22.2%	23.7%
Asia	**19.9%**	17.4%	19.6%
Middle East and North Africa	**19.0%**	12.5%	18.1%
Pacific	**16.3%**	36.0%	18.4%

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union,2019

As of 1st January 2019, in terms of regional averages, (these were single, lower and upper houses combined); the Nordic countries with 42.5 per cent, had the highest number of women in women in national parliaments followed by the Americas, 30 .6 per cent; Europe including Nordic countries, 28.6 per cent; Europe excluding Nordic countries, 27.2 per cent; Sub-Saharan Africa, 23.9 per cent; Asia, 19.9 per cent; Arab States, 19.0 per cent; and the Pacific, 16.3 per cent (IPU, 2019). Relatively, the improvement in the political representation of women increased marginally from previous years. In terms of women's share of single or lower houses of parliament, three of the world's top 10 countries are in Sub-Saharan Africa: Rwanda, Namiba and South Africa. Interestingly in the 1990's, no African country had elected more than 30 percent women to their single or lower houses, by 2019, thirteen countries elected more than 30 percent women to such legislative houses; four elected more than 40 percent while one, Rwanda, elected more than 60 percent (IPU, 2019). Since 2003, Rwanda has maintained the record as the country with the highest female legislative representation in the world, surpassing the Nordic countries (Tripp, 2003). By 2008, Rwandan women won 45 of the 80 seats in the lower parliament. Rwanda became the first country in the world to have more women than men in a chamber of parliament. Nearly half were elected in women-only seats, with the rest triumphing in open ballots. (The Guardian, 2018). The Rwandan experience has proven to be a referenced landmark not only in Africa but for all democracy (Cole, 2011:14). Other African countries such as Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique, and Ethiopia ranking 7, 10, 11, 17, and 18 respectively have also been highly ranked for the level of women's representation in their parliaments as shown in table II:

Table II: Women in National Parliaments (Situation as of 1st January 2019)

WORLD CLASSIFICATION									
Rank	**Country**	**Lower or single House**				**Upper House or Senate**			
		Elections	**Seats ***	**Women**	**% W**	**Elections**	**Seats ***	**Women**	**% W**
1	**Rwanda**	03.09.2018	80	49	61.3 %	26.09.2011	26	10	38.5 %
2	**Cuba**	11.03.2018	605	322	53.2 %	---	---	---	---
3	**Bolivia**	12.10.2014	130	69	53.1 %	12.10.2014	36	17	47.2 %
4	**Mexico**	01.07.2018	500	241	48.2 %	01.07.2018	128	63	49.2 %
5	**Sweden**	09.09.2018	349	165	47.3 %	---	---	---	---
6	**Grenada**	13.03.2018	15	7	46.7 %	27.04.2018	13	4	30.8 %
7	**Namibia**	29.11.2014	104	48	46.2 %	08.12.2015	42	10	23.8 %
8	**Costa Rica**	04.02.2018	57	26	45.6 %	---	---	---	---
9	**Nicaragua**	06.11.2016	92	41	44.6 %	---	---	---	---
10	**South Africa**	07.05.2014	393	168	42.7 %	21.05.2014	54	19	35.2 %
11	**Senegal**	30.07.2017	165	69	41.8 %	---	---	---	---
12	**Finland**	19.04.2015	200	83	41.5 %	---	---	---	---
13	**Spain**	26.06.2016	350	144	41.1 %	26.06.2016	266	98	36.8 %

14	**Norway**	11.09.2017	169	69	40.8 %	---	---	---	---
15	**New Zealand**	23.09.2017	120	48	40.0 %	---	---	---	---
16	**France**	11.06.2017	577	229	39.7 %	24.09.2017	348	112	32.2 %
17	**Mozambique**	15.10.2014	250	99	39.6 %	---	---	---	---
18	**Argentina**	22.10.2017	255	99	38,8 %	22.10.2017	72	30	41.7 %
"	**Ethiopia**	24.05.2015	547	212	38.8 %	05.10.2015	153	49	32.0 %
20	**North Macedonia**	11.12.2016	120	46	38.3 %	---	---	---	---

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019/ http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.ht

These cases are good examples of illustrating developments in women's political participation.

Trends in Women's Political Participation: A Continental Focus

The 1990's witnessed an increase in the presence of women in politics in Africa. This phenomenon was engendered by the liberalization of the political space and the emergence of autonomous women's organizations in large numbers (Tripp, 2017). The end of conflict in many countries, especially after 2000, further expedited women's quest for political power resulting in greater rates participation of women in post-conflict countries. Stimulus by international actors like the United Nations, its Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Conference on Women in Beijing compelled member states to take measures to increase female representation. Largely, impetus was assisted by regional and national pressures especially from "domestic coalitions of women's and civil-society organizations and actors" (Trip, 2017: 20).

Women are becoming vibrant in partisan politics. The longstanding African tradition which defined a woman's role as private and household responsibilities like care-giving, kitchen and other room duties (Pogoson, 2016), is gradually being eroded by a blend of forces. Across the continent, women demonstrate their resolute to actively participate in politics; a clear indication that women can also be decision-makers at both the private and

public realms. In some countries social tolerance of women's participation in politics is apparent, making it possible for women leaders to set different agendas for themselves in public life. Many African countries have adopted multiparty democracy albeit with capricious levels of permanence, and appropriateness. This trend has however opened up the political space with promising settings for greater participation of women in public life, and their aspiration to positions of national leadership and decision making. Record numbers of women candidates emerged to contest in elections. For instance, Charity Ngilu and Wangari Maathai ran for the presidency of Kenya in 1997 and became the first ever female presidential candidates of the country. Likewise, Professor Remi Sonaiya contested in Nigeria's presidential elections in 2015 and was Nigeria's first female presidential candidate. While these candidates did not win, their attempt highlights women's "personal conviction that they have something important to contribute to the political process and their fortitude in standing up for their political rights" (IPU, 2017:1) in Nigeria's 2019 Presidential election.

Increasingly, women have also taken on leadership positions as corporate leaders, civil society activists, political party leaders, mayors, cabinet ministers, prime ministers, and presidents (Geiger and Kent, 2017). This is validated in the election of women presidents in countries like Liberia, Malawi and the Central African Republic. The election of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia as the first female African Head of State in 2006 was a significant development in women's representation at the highest level of national decision-making. (Mikell, 2009). President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's candidacy was followed by Mrs. Joyce Hilda Banda, taking office as the first female President of Malawi following the sudden death of President Bingu wa Mutharika. in 2012 (Tenthani, 2012). More recently, the appointment of Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala in February, 2021, as the first female and first black president of an audacious institution as the World Trade Organization (WTO), lays credence to strides of women's political participation.

Despite the increased global visibility of women in politics, and increase in women's political participation across the political spectrum in Africa, there is still a wide gap in women's political participation when compared with men. Globally, these gender differences reflect "the resistance of legislative (and other) systems to recognize their responsibility in reproducing male-dominated systems of patronage and power and presenting internal barriers to women's progression within political parties" (Brody, Burnley & Phyu, 2016:3). In response to this lack of gender equity in governments and to the appeal for affirmative action in the Beijing Platform for Action, increasingly, more countries are introducing quota systems for increasing women's participation. Quotas can be debatable tools of politics, but effective when appropriately applied and are becoming recognized as an important strategy to ensure women's inclusion in public life. "The

widespread adoption of gender quotas is one of the most important political developments of the modern era" (O'Brien & Rickne, 2014: 2) and a significant body of work has studied the usefulness of quotas in increasing women's presence in parliaments, political participation and engagement (Matland 2006; Krook 2009; Paxton, Hughes, & Painter 2010; Barnes & Burchard 2013; Kittilson & Schwindt-Bayer, 2012). Gender quotas suggests that women are welcomed in politics and increases women's presence in politics. Quotas ultimately lead to women's increased participation in political activities. Eventually, the gap between men's and women's participation narrows when gender quotas are introduced, (Beauregard, 2017).

Party quotas and reserved seats account in large measure for the higher female representation in Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, and several other African countries. Most of the higher figures for female representation worldwide have been a result of a quota system of one kind or another. By January 2019, thirteen African countries were among the top 30 countries worldwide in terms of women's presence in a single or lower house of parliament (IPU, 2019). Women are making progress in closing the political disparity gaps in the percentage of women parliamentarians, though they remain significant. Across the continent, a number of countries introduced policies aimed at increasing women's presence in national parliaments. Despite these policies and advances made by women in respective national parliaments across the continent, Sub Saharan Africa like a few regions of the world continues "to lag in indicators of gender equality and women's advancement" (Stotsky, Shibuya, Kolovich, and Kebhaj, 2016; 42). Women's fate in political participation continue to fluctuate vastly; underrepresented at all levels of government, with limited power to influence decision making as the following section indicates.

Another notable trend of women's political participation despite the preceding trend, is forming strategic networks with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and women's movement groups. CSOs in their bid to seek active participation of women in politics put pressure on the state, demand and advocate for constitutional/electoral amendments, and support for women's political leadership. In addition, civic education and capacity building programmes for women are conducted by CSOs and women's movement groups. These include Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (Nigeria); Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative(Nigeria); Action for Development (Uganda); National Women's Lobby Group (Zambia); National Committee on the Status of Women (Kenya) amongst others.

Participation of women in decision-making has been placed at the core of the global agenda. Although feminist activism alone does not produce change, feminist pressure

expedites change and progress in women's rights and anti-discrimination (Dersnah, 2012). International pressures, rules and norms further give the required impetus to these new demands. The growth of a non-partisan, national-level organizations supporting women's political activities, has been stimulated by availability and accessibility to donor funds channeled through international and local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and CSOs. The NGOs and CSOs support "the efforts of women to participate in civic education, constitutional reform, legislative reform, leadership training, and programs for women parliamentarians" (Ndlovu and Mutale, 2013:74). The international women's movement and bodies like the UN women, the Inter Parliamentary Union, also plays a significant role in assisting women to aspire to political office and affect decision-making.

Efforts to address women's political under-representation in Africa have stimulated the potential for increasing women's entrance to political power. These efforts have however, produced marginal results and incremental changes. Women have yet to see significant political rewards in terms of elected and appointive positions. As the next section indicates, women cannot do it alone. Existing discriminatory laws, practices and stereotypes that militate against women's effective political participation must be repealed or amended. There should be concerted support for and the promotion of women's active and meaningful participation in all forms of representation at all levels of government.

Factors Militating against Women's Political Participation

Significant trends have been captured in the preceding section expounding the participation of African women in politics. Despite the opening up of the political space for greater participation of women in public life; women's determination and struggles to attain positions of national leadership and decision making; the role of quota provisions; and the donor community and electoral assistance agencies, the prevalent trend and pattern in terms of women's effective political participation in Africa, has customarily been low. Women have habitually been marginalized from the structures of the state that govern political processes and these, can be attributed to several factors. Three main factors (cultural, financial and political factors) are discussed in this section.

Cultural Factors

The cultural determinism theory opines that culture is a critical element in molding the fortune of a nation, as such, it supports the claim that the African culture has constructed gender roles (Rabie, 2013). This argument is embedded in the patriarchal nature of the African society that structures men at sensitive and lead positions in the public domain whilst the women trail behind them. Culture and tradition play strong roles in many African communities. A number of cultures and traditions are unsympathetic to women

and isolate them from full participation in politics or other activities in the public realm (Pogoson, 2012). Although, activities of feminists groups and movements are rendering this trend unpopular, its enduring extremism has left many women neglected and marginalized. (Owoyemi & Olusanya, 2014). Adhiambo-Oduol (2003), identifies these cultural factors as socio-cultural beliefs, attitudes, biases and stereotypes which debars development and progress, as it emphasizes the superiority of men and the inferiority of women. According to Allanana (2013:116), "Patriarchy justifies the marginalization of women in education, economy, labour market, politics, business, family, domestic matters and inheritance". Female political aspirants generally point to the challenge of patriarchal social norms, held in place by both men and women, which dictate that a woman's place is in the private realm, not in public life.

On the other hand, granting financial waivers to women on membership form, electoral tickets to contest elections, and political party fines etc., may not necessarily translate to improved women's participation which it was intended to project. Hence, as **Robinson & Gottlieb (2021), suggests, cultural practice which** generates differential gender norms, integrates the cultural notion that women do not belong in the public sphere. Such patriarchal culture is a potent determinant of male dominance in the political and public realm. Essentially, men are trained for leadership pursuits while women are restricted to "domestic activities; roles ascribed to them by culture which affect them later in life, thereby making them to lose self-confidence/worth and have low self- esteem in their career in adult life, politics inclusive" (Allanana, 2013:116). Discrimination against women can also be strengthened by religious doctrines that consider female politicians immoral or unnatural. Male dominated political culture, stereotypes and values remains a significant obstacle to gender imbalance in political offices.

Financial factors

Big money politics is a leveller and provides a disproportionate disadvantage to many especially women, who are not evenly empowered like their male counterparts. The political space in most African countries is highly monetised, this explains why few women emerge as flag bearers of the major parties. The contention of the concept of money politics influences Walecki's (2008) view to be narrowed down to any money spent for electioneering or campaign purposes. According to him, this money may be collected and spent by candidates for public office and also by their political parties or by other individuals or organized group of supporters.

Most women lack the financial muscle to sponsor elections, while commenting on the volume of money involved in elections in Nigeria. "Most women are not proportionally empowered, to muster the kind of resources required to prosecute elections …"

(Mmaduabuchi ,2015:392). In light of this, Olufade asserts that, "The election process requires tons of cash to buy votes and compromise consciences. Candidates without deep pockets or wealthy backers cannot actualize their dreams of contesting for public office. Nomination forms to contest for elective offices in most parties are very expensive". According to him, limited access to credit and finance also scuttles women's dreams of participation (Olufade, 2013:165). Exorbitant electoral finance is another obstacle to the achievement of gender equality in the electoral process. This is partly because women have traditionally been relegated to the private, domestic sphere, and thus have neither the personal financial resources nor the networks to allow them compete effectively in increasingly expensive electoral politics. Furthermore, party engineering, enabled by funds is a significant determinant of who flies the party's flag. The exorbitant cost of contesting a party nomination is disadvantageous to women, who typically have less access to financial resources than men. Be that as it may, one of the major setbacks of economic development in recent times, is the exclusion of women in politics (Orisadare, 2019). In essence, women's political participation must begin first from financial empowerment, then political empowerment which inadvertently metamorphoses to a national economic development.

Political Factor

The volatility of the political space in Nigeria, barricades female aspirants**.** The nature of Nigerian politics has been engulfed with all sorts of violence before, during and after the electoral process, for instance, the issue of late night meetings in most cases remain an uphill task for most women who have to cater for the family and sustain the societal expectation of a married woman, who must not keep out late in the night. Hence, most women do not want to associate with them, especially, married women due to what society may think about them. Isiaka, posits that,

> …the very nature of partisan politics in Nigeria is nothing to write home about as far as gender is concerned. Male politicians believe in political thuggery, elimination of political opponents, incitement of ethnic and sectarian violence, vote rigging, intimidation, vote buying and unnecessary clandestine meetings targeted at excluding women from participating (Isiaka Alani, 2006:62).

Likewise, Okuomola and Okunola (2011) whose study investigated factors endangering women from politics, trend and pattern of women's participation in election over the last decade, extended Isiaka's view point, affirming that, women are becoming more responsive to the political space, hence overcoming the ancient obstructions modelled against women's political participation. Consequently, with the increasing rate of women

political consciousness, most women are still regressive in political and social activities that are violence-laced. In essence, the most extreme form of gender inequality in Nigeria is violence against women (Anaeme,2012). In Nigerian politics, threats are established, thereby advancing the surreptitious 'do-or-die' nature of politics barring women political participation, especially with the level of politically motivated killings (Olufade, 2013).

Conclusion/ Recommendations

The full and equal political participation of women is a prerequisite for democratic governance. However, globally, women continue to be marginalized from the political sphere due to restrictive laws and institutional barriers, discriminatory cultural practices, and disproportionately low access to quality education, healthcare, and resources. Yet reversing discriminatory policies and practices is possible and has been done.

Women involvement in Nigerian politics has been an all-time low. Although they constitute half of the Nigerian population, women have continued to be relegated to the background as far as being elected to elective positions is concerned. Most recently, the prevailing tide has tilted with more women participating in politics, nonetheless, there is still a disproportionate margin between men's political participation and women political participation. In other words, despite their numerical strength, women have been underrepresented in the governance process in the country which is not productive for democracy and development. The more participation from women as voters, political party leaders, public office holders and parliamentarians, the more their place in politics becomes established (Pogoson, 2018).

According to Bellington, 2008: 5, "The attainment of gender equality and the full participation of women in decision making are key indicators of democracy. The involvement of women in all aspects of political life produces more equitable societies and delivers a stronger and more representative democracy."

With a background on global, regional and Nigerian instruments of inclusive politics from both genders, the preceding sections focused on women's political underrepresentation in Nigeria. This shows that Nigeria has not attained 30 percent affirmation as prescribed by the Beijing Platform of Action. Three major factors responsible for this trend were analyzed and to take Nigeria out of this debacle, stakeholders must assume responsibility in accepting the underrepresentation of women politically, as gross discrimination. Importantly, a legal framework that is binding should be enforced, such that supports a gender-balanced representation in elected bodies at local and regional levels.

Progress in the field of women's political representation, as in the case of Rwanda, has been achieved when legislators introduced rules aimed at tackling the issue of low female representation in representative elected bodies, in particular by means of reforms introducing equal constitutional rights such as the right to vote and to be elected, right of access to public office and other fundamental rights and freedoms, such as the right to property, inheritance, marriage, citizenship etc. These constitutional rights are aimed at removing discrimination on grounds of sex or any other discrimination limiting equal citizenship. In other words, gender-sensitive laws, policies, programmes and budgets based on a thorough understanding of the multifaceted issues that affect women should be considered in making electoral laws.

To function at par with their male counterparts, the society should consciously advance policies that empowers women financially. Some women have tended to pull back due to funds. Women should be given some leverage financially, such as obtaining forms at little or no cost, especially at the party level. Importantly, gender mainstreaming and quota system should be actively engaged in Nigeria's political life as well as the establishment of a system of gender mainstreaming which incorporates 35 percent of women in all sectors of government. Furthermore, the electoral body INEC should implement, monitor and evaluate policies and programmes saddled with these tasks. The foregoing tells a compelling story of the persistent missing voice of women in leadership and statesmanship positions. As observed by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, over time, the proportion of women in politics are changing for the better, albeit slowly' however, "the overall stagnation and specific reversals are warning bells of erosion of equality" (Moloney, 2017: para 4). Similarly, the functional equality for women through protection of women's right can be optimally actualized when there is a synergy across parliaments, governments, civil societies and international organizations (Inter Parliamentary Union Press Release, 2017). For effective women's participation in governance and public service, stakeholders across international, regional and state boards must come together to resist anti-progressive elements limiting a stable world.

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