



Analyzing Women's Participation in Politics and Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: The Liberal Feminists' Perspective

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Abstract

Nigeria has a long history of gender inequality. However, since the return of democracy in 1999, there has been a noticeable but inconsistent increase in the level of women's participation in politics and governance. Observably, Nigeria recorded 7.06% representation of women in the National Assembly in 2011, which is the highest in twenty-four years. Thereafter, there has been a decline in women's representation in the National Assembly from 5.65% in 2015 to 4.17% in 2019 and 3% in 2023 respectively. Addressing such inequality, Liberal Feminists advocated gender equality through affirmative action from the political and social philosophy perspectives. This paper therefore analyses women's participation in politics and governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic using the Liberal Feminism lens. The survey research design with a qualitative approach was adopted to achieve this objective. Specifically, a critical review of literature was done while other secondary data were sourced from relevant databases. Findings revealed that progress towards gender equality in Nigeria has been slow due to cultural and societal attitudes towards women, socio-economic factors, and systemic barriers among others. Findings showed that about 15,000 candidates contested various positions in the 2023 general elections with only 10% women.



This paper concluded that the achievement of gender parity depends largely on affirmative measures, legal and policy reforms, the introduction of a quota system, and programmes that promote women's political and economic empowerment, which forms the thrust of Liberal Feminism. Among other things, the need to strengthen legal frameworks while addressing barriers that strengthen gender inequality in political participation was recommended.

Keywords: Liberal Feminism, Gender Equality, Women's Political Participation, Governance, Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Introduction

Discrimination against women in modern societies manifests in various ways: politically, socially, religiously, and culturally among others. By this, women have been pushed into disadvantaged positions in many countries of the world. Women make up about half of the total population of the world and have contributed immensely to development (Boserup, et al, 2013) however, they are hardly involved in decision-making processes even when such decisions directly affect them (Ilesanmi, 2018). Gender inequality is very evident as women are hardly seen to occupy top political seats in many countries. As opined by Tsikata (2009), gender inequality has resulted in marginalization, social exclusion, and slow economic progress as a result of the serious neglect of a large proportion of society's human resources.

The term gender does not refer to women, nor does it exclude men. Aina (2012) described gender as a social construct that is "a socially constructed inequality between women and men". Thus, in defining the term gender, the state of affairs of men and women ought not to be analyzed in isolation but in relationship to each other. Therefore, gender equality involves the acknowledgment of the distinctive interests, needs, and priorities of both women and men, while also recognizing the diversity within different groups of both genders. Fair treatment of both genders is a fundamental human right and a vital component of sustainable, people-centred development (NZAID 1997). Therefore, any departure from these principles will lead to inequality.

In politics, the issue of inequality has drawn attention favouring greater representation of women. According to Osuizigbo (2016), it is generally believed that women have been kept behind the scene for a long time in the nation's history, and this has resulted in them being treated as second-class citizens in the country. Speaking further,

Osuizigbo (2016) stated that the relegation of women in vying for political offices and/or being given political appointments has been due to cultural and religious stereotypes and the patriarchal structure of the society.

Men are seen to be more than women in number in party membership. This has been a disadvantage to women as they have little or no influence in decision-making. Ake, et al. (2019) in articulating this view opined that women's discrimination in politicking especially in political office allocation is a function of men's larger percentage in party politics. Since they (men) dominate the party hierarchy they tend to have more power in influencing and determining internal party politics and by extension the nation's politics (Kassa, 2015).

Articulating the views of Senator Oluremi Tinubu, Osuizigbo (2016) stated that despite women's seeming equal population as men as well as representing a great number of the voting population, they are the minority when considering the number of candidates running for elective positions or the few who got elected. Prof. Remi Sonaiya, a presidential candidate in the 2015 election believed that there is a need for a paradigm shift of women's role in the polity away from the "ÁsoEbi" syndrome, singing and dancing during electioneering to having full participation in the electioneering process (Osuizigbo, 2016).

Contrarily, Ejumundo (2013) argued that the existing social problems in the Nigeria family setting which was a consequence of women abandoning their God-given responsibilities (home-keeping and Care-giving) will become further complicated if women should become fully empowered to have unhindered access to the political and decision-making arena in Nigeria. Ejumundo (2013) believed that when women abandon their responsibilities of home-keeping, the core values that promote the sound functioning of the family and strengthen the fabric of society would become eroded gradually.

However, Olugbemi (2011) thought that 'since women are good managers of their homes, they would be good managers of the nation. Olugbemi (2011) further opined that women are still being under-utilized as they have not been fully mainstreamed into politics and sharing of political offices. To this end, this work concerns itself with the task of analyzing women's participation in politics and governance particularly in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, (1999 to 2023) utilizing liberal Feminists' perspective.



Methodological Approach

In order to accomplish its goals, this study undertook a thorough analysis of the literature and a systematic search of reliable databases, such as Google, Google Scholar, and academic journals devoted to political science and gender studies. The search was conducted using terms and keywords like "women in Nigerian politics," "gender and governance in Nigeria," "liberal feminism and politics," "political representation of women," and "women's empowerment in Nigerian Fourth Republic."

The scholarly articles, academic papers, reports, and books produced between 1999 and 2023 were the main subjects of the literature review. Nigeria served as the geographic focus as researchers looked at women's experiences in politics and governance at various levels. A thorough examination of English-language literature was conducted with an emphasis on the interaction between liberal feminism and women's political engagement, the obstacles women face in politics and government, and the level of women's political participation in Nigeria.

Conceptual Discourse

Gender

Gender is a social construct that comprises the duties, attitudes, and expectations that were connected to being male or female within a specific cultural and social environment (Connell, 2009). Gender is multifaceted, affecting people's identities, social relationships, opportunities, and access to and control over resources, among other elements of their lives (Butler, 1990; Lorber & Moore, 2002). Summarily, this paper described gender as a framework that was socially constructed to shape expectations, ideals, and notions of what constitutes being a man or a woman. Gender and its associated issues frequently contribute to the persistence of discrimination and inequalities in the society.

Governance

The term governance can be used to describe the methods, frameworks, and mechanisms by which power is utilized, choices are made, and actions are carried out in society (Biswas, 2022). In a similar vein, IBE-UNESCO (2023) characterized governance as encompassing "systems and procedures designed to promote accountability, openness, adaptability, adherence to legal principles, stability,

fairness, inclusivity, empowerment, and extensive involvement. Governance emphasizes the fact that decision-making is at the heart of government (Biswas, 2022).

Notably, inclusion and participation are crucial in government (Menocal, 2020). Diverse stakeholders, such as marginalized groups, civil society organisations, and the business sector ought to be represented in decision-making through the use of inclusive processes. According to Hein & Kohlmorgen (2005), governance endeavours to fulfill the needs of various groups and ensure their opinions are heard by involving all the necessary elements in the society. It is significant therefore to recognise that different contexts and viewpoints may have different understandings of and approaches to governance. As societies endure changes and look for more efficient and inclusive decision-making processes, the idea of governance continues to shift.

Political Participation

The concept of political participation can be described as the active engagement of citizens in the political process. This includes a variety of actions that are taken to shape public policy, participate in governance, and have an impact on political decisions (van Deth, 2021). Hern (2017) stated that political participation is key to democracy because it enables individuals to exercise their rights and participate in the procedures that determine how their lives are lived.

Voting in elections, becoming members of political parties, being part of rallies, participating in non-violent protests and demonstrations, discussing policy, and running for political office are all avenues for political involvement (Sairambay, 2020). Furthermore, Sairambay (2020) supporting the views of Hooghe et al. (2014) explained that due to the changing nature of political participation, it now involves informal and unconventional avenues like social media advocacy and online activism, which have grown in importance in the digital age.

Nevertheless, inclusiveness and equity are not always hallmarks of political involvement. Socially and economically disadvantaged people, women, and members of racial and ethnic minorities are often confronted by militating barriers preventing them from participating fully in politics. Inequalities in the system, discriminatory laws and practices, restricted access to resources and knowledge, sociocultural norms and biases, and limited educational opportunities are a few examples of these impediments. For true democratic representation to be achieved and the rights and interests of every

member of society to be served, these obstacles must be removed and broad political involvement encouraged.

Reforms in structure and culture should both be a part of efforts to increase political participation. This entails providing equitable access to political institutions, encouraging transparency and accountability, cultivating an inclusive political culture that appreciates diversity, and putting affirmative action policies in place to rectify historical injustices (Sairambay, 2020). Therefore, in the context of this paper, political participation of women refers to the level at which women run for political positions and are appointed to appointive positions.

Women Participation in Politics: Liberal Feminism Perspective

The viewpoint of liberal feminists, according to Tong (1992), is that women's subordination is firmly ingrained in both legal and customary restrictions, which obstructs their access to and success in the public realm. They therefore promote equal rights and opportunities for men and women while pursuing gender equality through political and legal means. The idea that liberal feminists have been instrumental in furthering the cause of gender equality was also backed up by Oke (2011). Lorber (ND), in her book "The Variety of Feminism and Their Contribution to Gender Equality," observed that liberal feminism opposes the idea that gender inequalities are biologically established.

Liberal feminists, on the other hand, hold that because men and women are fundamentally identical, they ought to be accorded the same legal protections. According to Oke (2011), liberal feminism also aspires to advance gender equality by guaranteeing that women participate equally with men in all spheres of public decision-making in order to effectively address women's issues. Furthermore, according to Lorber (ND), the liberal feminism movement has been successful in lowering barriers to admission for women into fields where men predominate and achieving income parity. It is no longer breaking news that Nigerian politics is considered to be a man's world due to the perception that it is a filthy environment where a woman may not be able to advance unless she is also willing to "swim in the dirty waters".

Liberal feminists contend that barriers such as gender-based discrimination, a lack of access to resources and education, and gender stereotypes that limit women's leadership potential are to blame for women's underrepresentation in politics rather than a lack of ability or interest on their part. Liberal feminists support legislation and reforms that advance women's equality in rights and



opportunities, such as quotas or designated seats in political parties and legislative bodies, as well as gender-sensitive legislation that takes into account the particular needs and experiences of women.

Liberal feminists advocate for women's involvement in all facets of politics, including voting, grassroots activism, and leadership roles in both the public sector and political organisations. They contend that the opinions and experiences of women are crucial for democratic decision-making and that more gender diversity in political institutions produces better policy results. (Tong, 2009) Given the aforementioned justifications, liberal feminism advocates for equal rights and opportunities for men and women to run for office, be appointed to positions of authority, and participate in the electoral process in order to increase the participation of women in Nigerian politics. The ultimate goal is to abolish gender-based prejudice and acknowledge the equal abilities of men and women, particularly in the public domain. In doing so, women would be given an equal opportunity for political representation, involvement, and power distribution, with their viewpoints and interests valued on a level with those of men. In conclusion, liberal feminism stresses the significance of women's political participation in achieving gender equality and supports laws and reforms that encourage equal access to political influence and representation (Lovenduski, 2013).

Proximate Determinants of Gender Inequality in Nigeria's Political Landscape

Different nations have varying degrees of female political participation and access to political power. The patriarchal nature of Nigerian society, which suggests that politics is not a suitable vocation for women, and the low literacy rate among women were likely contributing reasons in the past to the general indifference of Nigerian women in politics. However, there has been a minor change in the 21st century as more Nigerian women are becoming involved in politics and some have even found success in it (Nwammu, 2012 in Wonuola, 2015).

Despite the fact that more Nigerian women are increasingly engaged in politics actively, their level of success in political circles is still considerably lower than that of men. Scholars like Ngara and Ayabam, (2013) have identified various factors that inhibit women's political representation in Nigeria, including insufficient funding, negative perception of politics among women, political violence during elections, lack of self-confidence among women, marginalization of women in party leadership, low levels of education



and literacy among women, and cultural and religious discrimination. Some of these factors will be further discussed below:

In Nigeria, not all women have acquired adequate political education thereby making them less informed about politics. Although the acquisition of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination is the minimum requirement for contesting for any political position in Nigeria, not all women have acquired political knowledge, this has made them have a low political orientation to enable them to participate effectively in the political field (Odinonye & Ofoego, 2016).

Likewise, inadequate education is also an important determinant of the participation of women in Politics in Nigeria (Odinonye & Ofoego, 2016). The cultural belief of the women's place is in the kitchen and that the female child will someday get married has resulted in some parent's preference to educate their male child more than the female. Meanwhile, educational qualification is one of the requirements for contesting for elective posts in Nigeria nowadays.

The cultural factors that inhibit women's political participation in Nigeria seem to be more severe and deeply rooted than other factors. These factors suggest that a women are meant to 'man' the domestic sphere taking care of their husband and children rather than competing with men in politics. In a traditional Nigerian society, it is believed that politics is a man's duty because he is the head of the family. Women are culturally perceived as naturally and biologically inferior to men. As a result, women are relegated to "menial" tasks like cooking, housekeeping, and domestic work, while men are expected to engage in activities such as war, hunting, and strenuous tasks (Awofeso & Odeyemi, 2014). Therefore, men are expected to take leadership position, while women are expected to take less stressful roles like care giving.

Low self-image and lack of self-confidence are major contributors to women and their involvement in politics. This is marked by a deep sense of insecurity resulting in psychological dependence on the male folk. Idika (2010) opined that women, especially young girls tend to have low aspirations concerning their careers. Besides, fellow women frustrate even the little effort made by some women to rise above this low level. Thus, many women prefer men's leadership to that of fellow women.

There is no doubt that poverty has been recognized as a fundamental factor contributing to the challenges faced by women, particularly in



Africa and other developing regions. In societies where the proper education and economic empowerment of women have been neglected over a long period of time, intentional or unintentional actions have resulted in women being economically disadvantaged. Men tend to exercise control, dominance, and influence over the distribution of the world's resources according to their preferences. Ake et al. (2019) supported this observation by stating that men in Nigeria possess greater financial resources than women, thereby granting them a more competitive advantage in politics compared to women who have fewer financial means to invest in political endeavors. Consequently, due to their limited financial power, women often find themselves relegated to subordinate positions.

Political brutality, killings, issuing of threats, and kidnapping among several other social ills have been the other of the day recently in Nigeria politics. Political brutality has been one of the factors used to scare women away from politics as they are sometimes subjected to threats, marriage break-ups and kidnap of family members (Ake et al, 2019).

Furthermore, political meetings where vital decisions, such as the nomination of candidates are taken are often held at late hours of the day. Any woman who is worth her salt would not like to participate in such meetings because of her home. Non- participation of women in such meetings hinders them from vying for political posts.

Women's Political Participation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: 1999-2023

The journey for Nigerian women to secure decision-making positions through electoral contests has been fraught with challenges. Regrettably, their endeavors have yielded limited progress, as reflected by discouraging election outcomes. The decline in the representation of elected female politicians during the 2015 general elections serves as a stark indication of the political disempowerment experienced by women, highlighting a troubling pattern. Similarly, the recently concluded 2023 general elections witnessed a further decrease in the number of women elected to office, signaling a continuation of this unfavorable trend.

According to Olokor (2019) and Pwanagba (2023), the Independent National Electoral Commission and the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) Nigeria expressed dissatisfaction with the consistent decrease in the number of women elected into political offices, particularly at the parliament level. Despite 2970 women contesting for various political offices in the 2019 general elections,



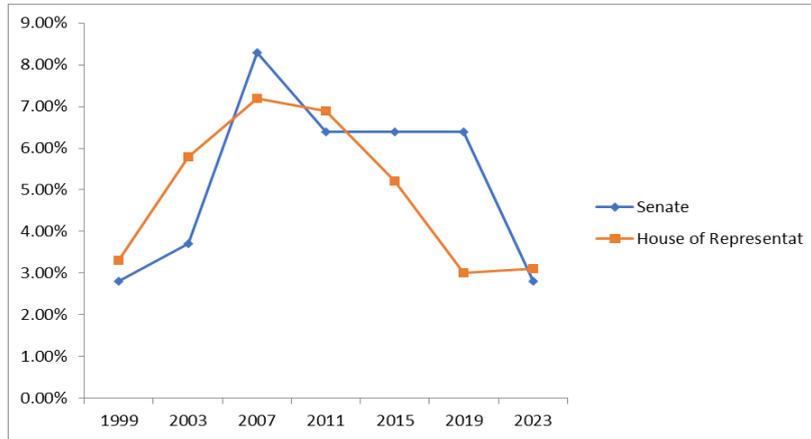
only 62 were elected. INEC's data indicated that Nigeria's female representation in the National Assembly decreased from 5.65% in the 2015 general election to 4.17% in the 2019 general election with a further decline in the 2023 general elections to about 3%.

INEC's collected data reveals a consistent pattern in the political participation of women in Nigeria since the resumption of democratic governance in 1999. For instance, in the National Assembly, there were merely three female Senators (2.8%) and twelve female House of Representatives members (3.3%) in 1999. The numbers increased slightly in 2003, with four female Senators (3.7%) and twenty-one female House of Representatives members (5.8%) being elected. In 2007, the figures improved further, with nine female Senators (8.3%) and twenty-six female House of Representatives members (7.2%) securing seats (INEC, 2019).

However, in 2011, the representation declined to seven female Senators (6.4%) and twenty-five female House of Representatives members (6.9%). The National Assembly displayed a similar trend in 2015, with only seven female Senators (6.4%) and nineteen female House of Representatives members (5.2%). Likewise, in the 2019 general election, the numbers were limited to seven female Senators and eleven female House of Representatives members. The recently concluded 2023 general elections witnessed a meager outcome, with only three female Senators (2.8%) and eleven female House of Representatives members (3.1%) being elected to the 10th Assembly.



The graph below presents these figures:



Source: (Quadri, 2016; Centre for Democracy and Development, 2019; Opara, 2023)

The figure above depicts the representation of women in the National Assembly in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023. Although there was an increase in the amount of women participation between 1999 and 2003 and between 2003 and 2007, this increase was however insignificant. Furthermore, there was a decline in these during 2011, 2015, 2019 and the just concluded 2023 elections. Despite the representation of women in this decision-making arm of the nation, their voice would hardly be heard due to their small number.

A report collated by Quadri (2016), and the Centre for Democracy and Development (2019) revealed that the 2015 general elections in Nigeria had only one female candidate contesting for the presidential election. Additionally, out of the 380 governor and deputy governor candidates, 87 were female (22.9%), out of 747 candidates for the Senate, 122 were female (16%), and out of 1774 candidates for the House of Representatives, 267 were female (15%). The table previously presented displays the percentage of women who were ultimately successful in the elections.

Likewise, Nwakwor and Nkereuwem (2019) in their analysis of the 2019 general election explained that the nation recorded only 6 female presidential candidates out of 73. One of the female candidates in the person of Oby Ezekwesili pulled out of the race just a few weeks before the election. The study conducted by the Centre for

Democracy and Development (CDD, 2019) revealed that the 2019 general election witnessed 74 and 275 female candidates for governorship and its deputy respectively out of a total of 2412 candidates. It is however disheartening that none of these women won the governorship seat while only 4 women out of 275 won the seat of the deputy governor.

Analysing the 2023 general elections, Opara (2023) posited that the recently concluded election recorded a lower level of female candidacy as few numbers of women indicated interest to run for elective offices compared to previous years. According to Opara (2023), out of about 15000 candidates that vied for different positions during the 2023 general election only 1550 are women representing about 10% of the total contestants with only one woman contesting for the position of President and no woman was selected to run for the position of Vice-President

Quadri (2016) stated that despite being considered free and fair, the 2015 general elections in Nigeria were marred by various acts of violence. The political environment in the country has been dubbed a "dirty game", making it difficult for women to survive. These challenges persist despite the establishment of the National Gender Policy of 2006, which aims to promote women's participation and support their bid to occupy 35% of elective positions in Nigeria.

Women are often viewed as supporters of male politicians rather than aspiring politicians themselves. Their significance as voters and supporters are often deemed more crucial than their ability to hold elective positions. According to Quadri (2015), politicians rely on their supporters to succeed, and women are often relegated to playing supporting roles such as cheerleaders, endorsers, mobilizers and voters. Despite performing these roles competently, women are rarely considered for significant decision-making positions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigeria has witnessed the involvement of women in politics at different levels. However, the nation still has a long way to go in closing the gender gaps in politics. A number of women have the aspiration to be involved in politics, however, they are often scared away by the realities of the dirty way in which Nigerian men handle political and electoral issues.

The political landscape in Nigeria is characterized by a patriarchal structure that predominantly reflects a masculine model of politics.

Various factors contribute to the exclusion of women from political participation. These include the absence of internal democracy within political parties, a highly competitive political environment, the exorbitant costs associated with running election campaigns, and the prevalence of godfatherism. Moreover, societal attitudes towards women in politics often harbor negativity, influenced by deep-seated perceptions of gender roles and the societal position of women.

These factors collectively hinder women's access to political power and impede their ability to effectively represent women's interests and address gender-related issues. Merely having a limited number of women in decision-making positions falls short of ensuring adequate representation of women's concerns. To achieve true gender equality in politics, it is crucial to address these structural and attitudinal barriers, promote internal democracy within political parties, create a more inclusive and supportive political environment, and challenge societal norms that perpetuate gender biases.

Based on these grounds this paper recommends the following:

- i. Increase in the creation of awareness for men and women on the need to close the gender inequality gap in politics.
- ii. Women should be encouraged to contest for elective positions by the political parties by waiving some cost of acquiring nomination forms and making the political sphere friendly for women to arouse their interest to participate actively.
- iii. Moreover, INEC Gender Policy should be enforced to ensure its commitment to the 2006 National Gender Policy's requirement of 35 percent women's representation in elective positions.
- iv. Furthermore, women should be made to understand the importance of having good female representatives in decision-making in the nation as this will give them a voice in issues that affect them.
- v. Increase Women's Political Participation: It is crucial to increase the participation of women in politics and this can be achieved through affirmative action policies, such as quotas or reserved seats for women in political parties and legislative bodies.

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- vi. Address Cultural and Social Barriers: Cultural and social norms that limit women's access to education, employment, and leadership positions should be seriously challenged. Continuous Advocacy and awareness campaigns can be used to educate communities on the importance of gender equality and women's participation in politics.
- vii. Strengthen Legal Frameworks: Nigeria's legal frameworks such as National Gender Policy, INEC Gender Policy, and VAPP, should be enforced to further promote gender equality and prevent discrimination against women in politics. This includes implementing laws and policies that protect women's rights to participate in politics, as well as ensuring that the legal system is accessible to all.
- viii. Provision of Support for Women in Politics: Women in politics should be provided with the necessary support to enable them to effectively participate and succeed. This includes access to funding, training, mentoring, and networking opportunities.
- ix. Increase Women's Representation in Leadership: Nigeria should strive to increase the representation of women in leadership positions, including the presidency, governorship, and ministerial positions. This will help to create a more inclusive political landscape and promote gender equality in the country.

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