



## Women Exclusion in Nigerian Politics: A Historical Re-Evaluation

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### Abstract

The systemic exclusion of women and minority groups in Nigeria's politics have contributed to the underdevelopment crisis in the country. Starting from the 1954 elections, the women remained underrepresented in both elective and appointive positions. At independence in 1960, the trend continued as the nationalists struggled to undo the damages of colonialism. It is regrettable to note, that, while the women played significant roles in the decolonization and nation-building process, however, their rights for equal representation were systemically undermined in a supposedly secular country where equality should be a fundamental principle shaping the society. Numerous studies in this field agree that women are potential asset in nation-building and as such must be given the opportunity to contribute to that process. This accounts for why women rank highest among the unemployed persons in the country, they are the least considered when distributing power or during allocation of political positions, and for more than fifty years in Nigeria, women have remained the most vulnerable in the country, often ranking highest in the poverty index annually. Based on the foregoing, the paper sought to critically re-evaluate the historical trajectories of women exclusion in Nigeria's politics to reposition the women and minority groups as principal actors in the political development of the country. It argued that, the system of exclusive governance was not an indigenous idea, but a colonial legacy which took practical expression in the Indirect Rule policy of the British. Data used for this study were collected through the qualitative method, which allowed for the use of secondary and primary sources. Secondary data used include books and journal articles. While primary materials were gathered using newspapers, official memos, recorded interviews and videos. The combination of primary and secondary data provided a balanced analysis of the phenomenon being studied. A theory of exclusion informed the theoretical argument of the paper, which holds that when individuals or groups in a society are denied their rights, it results to resistance, protests or conflicts that could potentially destabilize the nation. Consequently, the paper found that Nigeria's political development has continued to suffer unprecedented setback due largely for the failures of successive regimes to adopt inclusive governance, which supports equal participation in politics. It concluded that, the racial discrimination of the British colonial officials rubbed-off on Nigerian political class who could not revert to the morals that govern the traditional African society in the pre-colonial time; built on communal living and inclusiveness.



The paper recommended the adoption and implementation of the 30% Affirmative Action, to enable women and minority groups contribute to the nation-building process.

**Key Words:** Political Exclusion; Economic Marginalization; Inequality; Political Development

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## Introduction

It exists a systemic exclusion of women and minority groups in Nigeria's politics, which have contributed to the political and social upheavals in the country. Political exclusion is not a new discourse in Nigeria's political space, it started as early as 1954, the year that marked the first ever elections in the country and since then, women and minority groups such as the physically challenged people have remained underrepresented in both elective and appointive positions. Nigeria's independence in 1960 presented an ample opportunity to correct some of these anomalies introduced by colonialism like the divide and rule system, but regrettably, the trend continued as the nationalists who controlled politics at the time struggled to provide effective leadership that addressed critical national political challenges.

Nigeria since independence in 1960 have remained fragmented and characterized by instabilities and inequality. The instabilities are to a large extent the effects of many years of marginalization and political exclusion, especially of minority and vulnerable groups such as women, the physically challenged and ethnic minorities from the main stream of governance (Tribuneonline.com, 2021). In principle, it appears that the country is projecting democracy and inclusive governance, but in practice, the principles that underpin democracy are grossly lacking. From inception, women had always been politically relegated, because extant laws, religion and cultural beliefs are systematically and socially constructed to favor the men folk (Nish and Vezhaventhan, 2018). In fact, Nigeria can be described as a patriarchal society, where women at best become wives and are not valued as assets in leadership and nation-building process. Any attempt by women to dare pursue careers or political aspirations often attracts societal



condemnation, name calling, stigma and family resistance (DW Documentary, 2021). Hence, the low representation of women in Nigerian politics.

Nigeria before colonialism was a balanced society where both men and women operated as equals. At the home front, both genders played their roles without interference from anyone. Politically, Nigerian society prior to colonialism was designed to accommodate male and female with each respecting the other, thereby creating harmony in the society. In that era, women owned lands, slaves and were sufficiently involved in governance through the age-grade system, village socio-cultural groups and family unions known as *umunna* or *umuada*. It was this sense of equality between men and women in the pre-colonial days that gave impetus to the Aba Women riot of 1929 (Enyioko, 2021). This riot was a protest from women against imposition of tax by the colonial masters. It was the female folks that organized and implemented the protest without recourse to the men. There were also instances where the women led warriors to victory such as Queen Hangbe of Benin kingdom. All these demonstrated equality in the Nigerian society before the European invasion, which suggests that women actually had equal opportunity to lead.

However, the Nigerian social structures began to change during their contact with Europeans, more effectively within the colonial era. The relegation and subjugation of women in Africa started as colonial masters who operated large plantations forced the men to work in the farm while the women were required to either stay at home or provide menial services like selling hot drinks to the workers or providing free sex. It was against this backdrop therefore that Anigwe argued that colonialism drastically affected gender relations in Nigeria and accorded greater powers to men' (Anigwe, 2014). The relegation of women by the colonial policies did not completely silence the voices of women in the country. Studies indicate that to a certain extent, women actively participated in the politics and processes of decolonization, starting from the 1940s all through to the 1950s (Anigwe, 2014). Names like Hajia Gambo, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, and Margaret Ekpo are revered in Nigeria for their courage and roles in the political and socio-economic movements that led to Nigeria's independence (Bakare, 2018). Their actions encouraged other women such as Dora Akunyeli, Ngozi Okonjo Iwala to venture into politics after independence. In India, women also featured prominently in their independence struggle.



For instance, Bhima Bai Holkar launched military attacks against the British forces during the liberation struggles (Shama, 1978). Many other women acted in like manner, but just like Nigeria, the efforts of the women in the struggle for independence are seldomly mentioned.

It is regrettable to note that the roles played by women in the Nigerian society and their efforts toward the liberation struggle from colonialism did not earn them a fair chance in leadership positions afterwards. Presently, women in Nigeria are still being marginalized, structurally denied political and economic benefits (Anigwe, 2014). The 2002 Beijing Platform for Action, suggests that women continued to encounter “economic empowerment and entrepreneurship barriers despite the fact that their participation in the workplace has increased over the years” (Anigwe, 2014, p. 13) and the gap keep widening.

Similarly, inequalities have become a chronic social challenge confronting women in Nigeria, particularly in pay, working conditions, and participation in leadership (Aro, 2022). To further reinforce the above assertion, “A 1996 World Bank report on gender and poverty in Nigeria, suggests that legal, regulatory, and cultural barriers may be keeping women more disadvantaged than men in terms of access to health, education, financial, and agricultural extension services” (Anigwe, 2014, p. 7). According to Busola Aro, the female folks are underrepresented in Nigeria’s labor force. Women make up about 50.5% of the total active work force in Nigeria, representing 61.3 million females in economically active population. Out of this number, less than 1million of them are employed in the formal sector, with a gap of 13.42% (Aro, 2022).

In Nigeria today, sexual division of labor dominates the labor and political sector. That consciousness that some tasks are exclusively reserved for a particular gender has continued to widen the gender gap in Nigeria (Agbalajobi, 2010, p. 75). For instance, they are few male chefs in Nigeria because; cooking is believed to be a female profession (Nwafor, 2021). Conversely, there is limited number of women in politics for the fact that the society view politics as male profession. The gender division is rooted in the colonial structure that apportioned responsibilities based on gender. On labor pay, the colonial masters trivialized the role of women and considered them less powerful than men. Where the women must work, the men were paid more than the women, because the men were considered more productive (Jaiyeola and



Aladegbola, 2020). This however, laid the foundation for the present gender division in Nigerian society and politics with its attendant consequences even after independence was achieved.

This paper not only underscored the role of women in the decolonization and nation-building process, however, it also argued that their rights for equal representation were systemically undermined, which contradicts the principle of secularity and gender equality. Aligning with other studies in this field, the study concurs that women are potential asset in nation-building and as such must be given the opportunity to contribute to that process. The paper was inspired by the rising negative perception of Western nation who conceptualize political exclusion as a problem created by Nigerians or indeed, Africans for themselves without admitting to the fact that the British introduced and encouraged it during colonialism by adopting the Indirect Rule System and practiced racial discrimination. It is the basis of debunking fallacies that the paper sought to critically re-evaluate the historical trajectories of women exclusion in Nigeria's politics to reposition the women and minority groups as principal actors in the political development of the country.

For the purpose of order and clarity, the study is structured and segmented. In the first segment, the study presented an introduction, which contained a background to the phenomenon under review. The second section explored the historical overview of the political development in Nigeria as it will help readers and researchers develop a good understanding of the series of events that shaped Nigeria's politics. In the third segment, the study explored the various factors that are limiting women's participation in politics. International comparative assessment between Nigeria and India was provided in section four of the paper to support the position of the paper that British colonial legacies promoted division and exclusion in their former colonies. Lastly, the conclusion provided a brief summary and discussions that highlighted the important arguments and recommendations.

### **Historical Overview of Political Development in Nigeria**

By 1930s, there were several anti-colonial agitators in Nigeria who were demanding for inclusion of more Nigerians in the governance of the country. Some of the groups include the



West African Student Union (WASU) founded in 1925 in London, the Lagos Youth Movement formed in 1934 (Chikalet al, 2014) and the efforts of the West African Pilot Newspaper continued to create political awareness across the country until 1960. The pressure they mounted on the British colonialists brought about reforms that saw more Nigerians in governance. One of the landmark achievements of the nationalists before independence was the constitutional reform of Sir Clifford's Constitution of 1922 that introduced elective principles in Nigeria. It marked the beginning of Nigeria's political and constitutional development.

The reform allowed Nigerians to be elected into the Legislative Council as the nationalist groups began to transform into political parties. For instance, the Lagos Youth Movement metamorphosed into Nigerian Youth Movement. More political parties emerged such as the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) (M. Shittu, 2013) etc. and by 1951, Macpherson Constitution was introduced to address some of the issues in the Clifford's constitution which include the demand to increase the number of Nigerians elected into the Legislative Council instead of three permitted in the elective principle. To ensure balance and equal representation at the national government, the nationalists formed regional parties such as the Action Group (AG) which was popular in the Western region and the Northern People Congress (NPC) dominated by Northerners (Shittu, 2013).

The first-ever elections in Nigeria were held in 1954, six years before independence but none of the parties had clear majority in the elections resulting to the merger of NCNC, AG, and NPC to form opposition bloc. It is often argued by Nigeria's political historians that the nationalists were not prepared for leadership, hence the instabilities that befall the country after independence (Tunde, 2007). The first election after independence was in 1964, which was marred by violence and intimidation of the opposition parties as the nationalists struggled for power, some candidates of the opposition parties were not allowed to campaign in the public and electoral materials were hidden from them. The election was generally averred to be unfree and unfair. It generated a lot of unrest and riots across the country leading to the killings of October 1965 all through to the January, 1966 coup and counter coups that triggered the three years Nigerian – Biafra Civil War (Shittu, 2013). In the early 1960s when the nationalists scampered for power,



women could not get involved in politics because of the excessive violence and bribery that characterized the electoral process at the time. Most of the women that were interested in participating in the elections lacked the resources to fund their campaigns. Same was the case of other vulnerable groups in the country, the constitution did not make provision for them thereby limiting their rights to participate in politics.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Women exclusion in politics is a complex social and political issue that can be explored utilizing different theories depending on how the researcher conceptualized the phenomenon. Theories such as feminism or human security provided analytical framework that addressed the challenges of inequality on a global scale by looking at exclusion from the prism of deprivation and poverty. With this, it became clear that these theories are inadequately equipped to explain social and political exclusion in the context of Nigeria's political complexities. It is on this basis therefore, that this study adopted the social exclusion theory, which originated from the Borrie Commission Report that expanded the deprivation discourse in early the 1990s to social exclusion (Byrne, 2005). Other contributors to the development of social exclusion theory include David Byrne, Amartya Sen and Dave Muddiman who distinguished deprivation from social exclusion and emphasized on the multidimensionality of the concept arguing that social exclusion is a recent idea that emerged from such concepts like social division, poverty and incapability.

As Walker and Walker would note, social exclusion is the opposite of integration, an idea closely related to the concept of citizenship proposed by Marshal, (1950, 1963). Therefore, the exclusion theory suggests that inclusive governance helps to address social issues such as poverty, insecurity, discrimination, inequality and reinforces sustainable democracy. Social exclusion theory emphasizes of national cohesion as a parnassia for growth and development. In fact, development in the modern sense implies equality of genders without any form of deprivation. Inclusive governance simply means giving every citizen or members of the society legitimate access to economic resources, social and political institutions that empower individuals to actualize their goals and aspirations within the limit of the law.



Social exclusion theory is considered suitable for this study because it provided the analytical structures, conceptual and intellectual frameworks that explains the political situation in Nigeria where not only the women folks are structurally excluded from politics but as well the Igbo race, other minority ethnic groups and the vulnerable like the physically challenged persons that ought to be protected through inclusive policies of the government. The theory was applied here to examine the various factors limiting women and minority groups from participating in Nigeria's politics. This theoretical framework provides the analytical structure that describes and explains why certain group of people in the country suffer exclusion. In the words of Amartya, (2000) 'the idea of social exclusion has conceptual connections with well-established notions in the literature on poverty and deprivation, and has antecedents that are far older than the specific history of the terminology might suggest'. For instance, Nigeria's inequality gap has continued to widen and it is evident in the recent inequality index report wherein 'Nigeria scored 35.1% in the 2022 Gini coefficient, which ranks 11th in West Africa and 100th out of 163 countries globally. Nigeria's income inequality is 1 to 14 for the top 10% to the bottom 50% of the population and 1 to 37 for the top 1% to the bottom 50%' (Harmon, 2023).

## **Methodology**

A methodological framework is a well-defined approach or tools that the researcher articulates to provide sequence of techniques to complete a study. Therefore, a methodology is defined as the group of methods used in undertaking a study, while a framework implies the structure of rules or ideas that guides research process. In this study, data used for this were collected through the qualitative method and the case study approach, which allowed for the use of secondary and primary sources. Secondary data used include books and journal articles. While primary materials were gathered using newspapers, official memos, recorded interviews and videos. The combination of primary and secondary data provided a balanced analysis of the phenomenon being studied. Qualitative method of research is theoretically informed and compatible with the social exclusion theory used to analyze the factors undermining women participation in politics.



### **Understanding the Factors Limiting Women Participation in Politics**

In Nigeria, there are inadequate policy interventions on the part of government to address the inequality gap. This gave rise to the high number of women unable to access employment, better education, and leadership opportunities. However, as the 2015 Executive Summary on Women Status will put it, the liberalization of global economy through industrialization, modernization and globalization have offered better opportunity for women to access job opportunities, better education and contribute to decision making processes (High Level Committee on the Status of Women, 2015). With globalization, nobody is limited to what they can achieve, unlike the 1950s – 1970s when governments controlled everything.

Nigerian women are beginning to make impact in business, education and leadership as a result of global integration. For instance, in 2021, a Nigerian woman, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala was elected Director General of World Trade Organization (WTO). Aside these, thousands of Nigerian women are leveraging on the opportunities offered by globalization to change the old narrative. Names such as Linda Ikeji, a blogger of repute, Omotola Jalade Kehinde, one of the most successful movie stars in Nigeria, Mrs. Alakija, an oil expert etc. have emerged leaders of their respective careers. This implies that the leadership dynamics are changing and the inequality gaps are being closed through unconventional processes like legislation or policy formulation. Today, women are founders of global conglomerate and sit in boards of large businesses-taking decisions that are contributing to world economic growth.

Regardless of the forgoing, there is a need for government and policy experts to address the gender inequality gap in Nigeria through legislation and policies. The policy intervention will help minimize the century long men domination of politics, religion, economic and social affairs of the country. Hence, the stereotyping and discrimination between men and women can be drastically reduced. Oluyemi Fayomi and Lady Ajayi, in their work *An Exploratory Study of Women in Political Leadership in Nigeria*, argued that the gender gap has persisted because both the Nigerian government and policy experts are gender blind, biased and insensitive to the economic and political potentials of women (Fayomi and Ajayi). Excluding the female folks from leadership positions has its consequences— one of such issues is that women's perspectives



are missed during policy formulation and that can become problematic during implementation of government policies.

Before delving into the factors limiting women from participating in politics, it will be reiterated here that gender discrimination in Nigeria is an offshoot of colonial legacies. Olayemi Fayomi and Lady Ajayi opined that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Nigerian women were competitive, resilient and provided leadership where necessary (Fayomi and Ajayi). Typical examples include Amina, the first Queen of Zazzau in the Northern region, who was reputed for her leadership skills. Queen Kambasa was a warrior of repute in Bonny kingdom. They fought and resisted colonialism and slave trade. Also, in Yoruba land, was Efunsetan Aniwura who rose to the rank of *Iyalodeor* women leader in Ibadan (Fayomi and Ajayi).

In the South-East of Nigeria, the Igbo women mobilized and stopped imposition of British Sterling on the trade groups. Madam Okwei who led the protest was later appointed as the special adviser to the king on women affairs and conflict resolution in 1935 (Fayomi and Ajayi). Other Nigerian women such as Mrs. Olufumilayo Ransome-Kuti, Madam Tinubu, and Madam Olajumoke Obasa among others played prominent roles in the 1930s and 1940s in promoting women welfare, equity, fairness and they campaigned for the alleviation of hardship (Fayomi and Ajayi). Their efforts were the catalyst to the establishment of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development by Decree No. 30 of 1989 (Database. unwomen.org, 2011). It is the duty of the ministry to initiate policy guidelines and advice the government on issues related to women and children.

Things began to change soon after independence in 1960. Women lost their collective power for action as demonstrated in the colonial era. According to Fayomi and Ajayi, the decline of female participation in leadership in Nigeria was partly orchestrated by ethnic bias and alliances which became more important than gender solidarity (Fayomi and Lady Ajayi). This forced the women to turn their support to the male folks without any consideration for their own interest. In 2019 elections, Mrs. Oby Ezekwesili and other three contestants withdrew from the presidential race and threw their support to President Muhamad Buhari of the All-Progressive Congress (Onyeji,



2019). Similarly, during the All-Progressive Congress party's primaries in June, 2022, the only female aspirant Mrs. Uju Ohanenye stepped down before the voting started to support Mr. Bola Tinubu (Oyeleke, 2022). These were the closest Nigerians had ever come to having a female president.

Between 1960 and 1965, only about four women were members of the House of Assembly. Matters got worse as the military stepped into power in 1966. The Nigerian military is dominated by men, which did not show any regard for women (Okpilike and Abamba, 2013). Under the various military regimes, the women participated minimally in the leadership of the country until 1985 when General Ibrahim Babangida came into power and changed how the military perceived women in leadership. According to Anina, it was Babangida who introduced the idea of *First Lead* (Anina, 2004) into the Nigerian political space. The Babangida military regime introduced the Better Life for Rural Women but "later renamed by the then First Lady, Mariam Babangida as Family Economic Advancement Program (FEAP). Afterwards, women intensified their interests in various leadership positions" (Akande, 1999). Subsequent wives of Presidents and Governors of states had special programs designed to improve the welfare of women and to encourage them to feature in politics.

Akande notes that in the 1989 constitution drafted by the Constituent Assembly, had only 5 women in the committee out of 150 members. The trend continued during General Abacha's military regime, where they were only three women in the Senate, while twelve were in the House of Representative out of three hundred and sixty members (Anina, 2004). At the state level, the women were equally poorly represented. For instance, the State House of Assembly nationwide had only twelve women out of nine hundred and ninety members. "At the local government level, out of 8,810 councilors across the nation, 143 were women while 9 out of 774 local government chairpersons were women. It is observed that from independence in 1960 to 1999 only about 3.1% of women were elected into political office and 5% into appointive position respectively" (Oluyemi). In fact, there are more appointed females than elective positions in Nigeria.



By 1999 when the military regime ended in Nigeria and democracy returned, there were slight improvement in the number of women participating in politics both as elective and appointive positions. Nevertheless, the number of women in politics was still considerably low if compared to population ratio in the country. An example was the outcome of “the 1999 general elections, where out of 11,881 available positions throughout the country, women won just 181” (kiyode-Afolabi, &Arogundade,2003).The UNDP report of 2005 indicate that by 2003 election, only 8.8% of women participated in the national House of Assembly election (UNDP, 2005). In subsequent general elections in 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019, female participation level appreciated due to increase in political awareness carried out by Governments and Non-governmental Agencies. Of particular importance was the willingness of the Chief Executives such the Presidents and Governors to run an inclusive government that accommodates women.

Presently, the former President, Mohmmed Buhari’s administration had more women in his government than any other regime in the past – who are occupying various positions, namely the Minister for Finance (Zainab Ahmed), Minister for Women Affairs (Pauline Tallen), Minister of State for Industry, Trade and Investment (Mariam Yalwaji Katagum), Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development (Sadiya Umar Farouq), Minister of State for Environment (Sharon Ikeazor), Minister of State for Transport (Gbemisola Saraki), Minister of State for Capital Territory (Ramatu Tijjani Aliyu), Head of the Civil Service of the Federation (Folashade Yemi-Esan), Special Adviser to the President (Mariam Uwais) etc. (Adesina, 2021). They are more than seventy women either appointed or elected at different levels of government under this regime.

A question that readily comes to mind is, why are the Nigerian women not participating or showing enough interest in politics? Scholars have made attempts to provide answers to this question. While government and policy experts have also been making efforts toward changing the narrative, studies indicate that culture issues contribute to the low participation in politics. The Executive Summary of 2015 on Women Status found that cultural limitation creates a barrier for a girl child to freely engage in social and political activities in adulthood. It begins by parents perceiving and treating a girl child as an “unwanted burden” that is only good to support



the male child and the entire family. A typical Nigerian girl child is raised by poor and illiterate parents who care less about abuses, violence, rape and impact of early marriage than the sociological development of the child.

Historically, it is yet unclear when the “discriminatory practices such as child marriages, dowry, witch hunting and gender biased sex selection which indicate profound vulnerability of and inequality towards girls and women actually started in Nigeria. Most of these cultural practices such as child marriage may have existed in the mediaeval period, but was only gained attention as the World Health Organization began to publicize the consequences. Child marriage is a denial of childhood, with irreversible consequences, especially for girls. Dowry devalues women. Witch hunting is a way to control a woman who do not conform” (High Level Committee on the Status of Women, 2015). It is generally believed in Nigerian culture that politics is a dirty game, therefore any woman engaging in politics is seen as wayward and the stigma causes women to shy away from politics. On the other hand, Nigerian politics is structured in such a way that politicians must appear hard and fearful. This posture may work for the men but definitely not for the women who must conform to virtue of submissiveness, gentility and loyalty as constructed by the society. Virtually every woman in Nigeria is conscious of the opinions of the society, the majority of the women do not want to be seen from the negative point because public image is an important family treasure that must be protected at all cost.

The role of Women in Nation-Building cannot be overemphasized. The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, signed by 160 governments, and adapted into many national gender policies and other legal and policy provision of member states, including Nigeria, stipulates that the full and complete development of any country requires the maximum participation of Women. This has proved to be a driving force to the prominence women development has come to acquire in recent times. In fact, world governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and other key policy experts have all stressed the need for women to adequately participate in the economy, government and overall growth of their countries (Chukwuemeka, 2011).



Even in traditional societies, where women are accorded domestic recognition, they had at one point or the other, taken out time to engage in activities relevant to the stability and continuous existence of their various communities. Women had also exhibited appreciable managerial and organizational skills in their roles as mothers, homemakers, character builders and sustainers of humanity. Their supportive roles through engagement in pottery, weaving, spinning and other socio-economic activities were indispensable to the existence of their families and societies by extension.

Some exceptional women had at one time or the other exhibited great knowledge of leadership and statesmanship across the globe - women like Nigeria's Queen Amina of Zaria, Emotan of Benin, Indira Ghandi of India, Golda Meir of Israel, Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, were good examples. These skills and ability have grown astronomically in recent times, given the improved education and employment opportunities. Names like Professor Grace Alele Williams, Dr. Tokunbo Awolowo Dosumu, Professor Ndi Okereke Onyiuke, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala and so on, are pointers to the high level of achievement of the Nigerian Women (Chukwuemeka, 2011). Similarly, the Nigerian government provides some stimulus to the education and self-development of women, knowing that an educated and economically independent woman is an asset to her home and the nation. Thus, women are encouraged to participate actively in the political affairs of their country. They are persuaded to engage in party politics, seek education as well as elections into political offices and aspire to occupy leadership positions in their respective parties. Women are also expected to be sensitive to government policies, react positively to national issues and make significant contributions to Nation-Building Strategies.

Unfortunately, the response of women to politics has been low. Women have continued to be audibly and visibly silent on key national issues. Only a few of them have come out to participate in politics. Thus, this research focused on the factors responsible for the low level of political participation on the part of the Nigerian women. Available evidences however support the claim that aside cultural barriers, there are several other factors responsible for the low level of women participation in politics, particularly in Nigeria where the roles of women are narrowly



constructed to include being wives and household assistants. There are numerous factors to consider, however, attention here will focus on money and political violence.

Politics in Nigeria has been monetized. In fact, it is usually referred to as “money bag” politics. Electoral periods therefore become a time to display wealth by contestants. Electorates are deceived into voting for the highest bidder(s) as they are not sure if they can benefit from the government when enthroned. The lack of enough financial resources and inadequate education are the basis of the socio-economic factors that hinder the political participation of the women. Women most times do not own resources, they are usually co-owners and such property lies in the hands of men (Agbalajobi, 2010). The few literates among women are usually unwilling to commit their meager financial resources to political activities since the likelihood of being supported by their political parties and male counterparts is often slim. There have been several efforts made by non-governmental organizations like the Gender and Development Action (GADA), Civil Liberties Organization, National Council of Women societies (NCWS), Women in Nigeria (WIN) among others to sensitize the women thereby increasing women’s political literacy. This however has not really translated to a good number of women featuring in the mainstream politics of their states (Agbalajobi, 2010).

Also, female participation in the electoral process is limited by the high cost of party nomination fees put in place by the bigger and more popular parties in Nigeria. Women who may want to run for elective positions may not be economically strong to pay such fees then the implication is that most women who desire to contribute their quota towards the development of the nation are not likely to be elected into public offices due to their inability to pay nomination fees. Also, the existing political god-fatherism, thuggery and gangsterism that characterize Nigerian political system may as well hinder women political participation. Political contests in Nigeria are also prone to violence, a “do-or-die-affair”, hence, seem not suitable for women – *do or die* simply means political violence, which many female politicians try to avoid. In the Nigerian landscape, there are rampant unresolved cases of political assassination. People see politics as an end in itself because of the economic gains through self-enrichment, hence would do everything possible to win by all means. This development makes political participation a difficult and risky venture for women (Eyinade, 2022).



## **Women in Politics: An International Comparative Assessment**

Over the past two centuries, women in some countries have made significant improvement in their participation level. In 2008, for example, Rwanda became the first country to have a female majority in the lower house of its parliament with 56% of representatives being female. Today, women hold 63.8% of the lower house of parliament, the highest proportion in the world. Scandinavian countries also have above-average female representation in parliament, with the average in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark cited at 41.2%. The rest of Europe and America have a strong patriarchal tradition, however, with female representation rates in teens and twenties. In Asia, Women represent 11.4% of the Indian parliament and 23.4% of the Chinese parliament, while several countries do not have any female representatives (Comstock, 2022).

The National Democratic institute submits thus: The full and equitable participation of women in public life is essential to building and sustaining strong, vibrant democracies. Accordingly, the meaningful participation of women in National, local and community leadership roles have become an important focus of global development policy (Tootell, 2015). It should be noted that about 25% of women lawmakers in the U.S cite women from the opposition party as key supporters of their top legislation, while only 17% of male lawmakers name similar support (Tootell, 2015). This according to the National Democratic Institute (NDI) confirms that women also work across party lines in political leadership. The NDI also claims that women prioritize education, health and other key development indicators in their role as political leaders. Using the data from the 19 OECD countries, researchers found that an increase in women legislators result in an increase in total educational expenditure (Tootell, 2015). In the Nigerian parliament, Remi Tinubu and other female Senators have been advocating for more women to be accommodated in leadership positions in the country that also reflected in the bills they sponsored in favor of women.



Similarly, there have been a notable improvement in women political participation in India starting from 1952, to the peak in 2014 when more women featured in political processes. Nigeria also advanced from 1954 to its peak in 2015, during Goodluck Jonathan's administration that consciously worked toward reaching the 30% Affirmative Action. India and Nigeria are similar in terms of political configuration. Both countries are democratic in nature, but still struggles with factors that limits its development and actualization of equality and social justice.

For instance, Subrata K. Mitra in the work *Politics in India: Structure, Process and Policy*, note that Indian democracy is characterized by controversy and contradictions, arguing that violence, corruption, community riots have continued to widen the gender gap in Indian politics (Mitra, 2017). However, according to Nisha and Vezhaventhan in their study titled *Political Empowerment and Participation of Women in India* the internationally accepted instrument for measuring the status of women is by their political participation, but regrettably women are still underrepresented in decision making positions in India. Just like the case of Nigeria, Nisha and Vezhaventhan indicate that economic, cultural, religious and social limitations contribute to women low participation in politics (Nisha and Vezhaventhan, 2018). They recognized that women participation in politics in India is gradually improving, but recommended that more awareness is need to meet the global standard (Nisha and Vezhaventhan, 2018). Global standard refers to the Affirmative Action, which is the international procedure designed to eliminate discrimination against women and the vulnerable in work places or leadership.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Democracy, as a system of government is considered effective if it is inclusive, which implies giving the people an equal opportunity, irrespective of their gender status to be part of the governance process and contribute to the national development. Indeed, the participation of women in the political process of any country is an important step towards a balanced and equitable distribution of power. It leads to a new perspective and a diversity of contributions to policy making and to priorities of development and it gives the female population a role in deciding the future of their country.



The forgoing analysis therefore highlights some of the issues limiting women from participating in political activities. The study observed that among other things, that cultural and religious beliefs, socioeconomic circumstances, psychological and political factors were the major reasons why women are not adequately represented in politics. Also, Nigeria's democracy is characterized by electoral malpractices, corruption, political intolerance, lack of intra-party democracy and insecurity. With these, the women most times feel threatened, thereby viewing politics as a dangerous activity.

Notwithstanding, the federal government's gender policy changes that brought more women into politics under President Jonathan who increased the number of women in government from 10% to 30% (Idike, 2014), the majority of these women were mere political appointees, less than 1% out of the women in government actually contested in the electoral process. One of the positive outcomes of the shift in government policy framework was the adoption of the 30% 'Affirmative Action' policy, which aroused the political consciousness of women in the country and therefore increased their level of participation. The successes attributed to the women appointees in Jonathan's Administration also motivated more women to get involved in politics so as to contribute to national development.

With this, the paper recommends that government at all levels in Nigeria, both traditional and secular leaders should pay close attention to the Thirty percent Affirmative adopted globally to address the rising incidences of gender discrimination especially in developing countries. Inclusive governance policies will encourage more women to participate in politics and contribute in national development. Suffice it to note that political inclusiveness is vital to sustainable democracy. For more women in Nigeria to effectively participate in politics, all the limiting factors such as electoral violence and fraud, money politics, and cultural issues must be addressed by establishing stronger and more inclusive political process to enable citizens irrespective of their race, gender, social status, religious or political ideologies to participate in electoral processes.



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