

Women's Participation in Elective Politics and Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the application and utility of J.S. Mill's principle of Liberty and Equality as a vehicle for promoting women's participation in elective politics and development in Nigeria. It contends that though gender exclusion was historically engendered by long period of discriminatory practices against women, J.S. Mill's principle holds the prospect of mitigating the unfair representation of women in elective politics that will herald accelerated development in Nigeria. Four research objectives and assumptions were formulated to guide the study. The liberal feminist theory as postulated by J.S. Mill was adopted. According to this theory, the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the sexes is wrong and needs to be replaced with a fair and perfect equality. Both the primary and secondary methods were used as method of data collection while content analysis was employed to analyse the data. The findings showed that though the majority of female respondents demonstrated active interest in politics, they were constrained by some of prevailing socio-cultural and religious factors, gender stereotypes, lack of financial capacity, unfavourable political environment and restrictive party structures and processes among others. Also, the bulk of male respondents confirmed these structural biases and barriers to women's political participation. In view of the finding, some relevant recommendations were offered, which include the implementation of deliberate policies and legislations that target women quotas and affirmative action. Again, voter education must capture the global quest for gender parity and place it in local context among others.

Key words: Politics, Gender, Political Participation, Elective Politics and Development.

INTRODUCTION

In a representative government, the supreme power of the state is vested in the constitution and exercised through representative bodies of the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government (Green, 1994). Implicit in John Stuart Mill's representative democracy is that the government will act on behalf of the governed, guided by the principle of individualism (Mill in Ebenstein, 2006); that the government will advance rather than restrict individuals' freedoms, and thus promote the people's true happiness by allowing their voices to be heard in matters of governance. It assumes that in a modern democracy, the right of every individual, including those of men and women alike, to freely participate in the decision making process of the state is recognised. In Mills view, liberty of thought and speech are considered self-regarding actions because, they occur within the realm of the individual, and hence the state ought to promote these rights, rather than restrict them (Mill, 1968). By implication, Mill recognizes that these are higher pleasures that are exclusively accessible to the human faculty. So, giving every individual a sense of involvement will undoubtedly increase both the "quantity" and "quality" of "pleasure" derived from freedom of thought and expression. Mill hints on the pursuit of moral and intellectual pleasure, which stresses the quality of life of the human being, believing that they will ultimately result in human upliftment and progress, and that the state must work to promote them, which is only possible under a representative government. Mill offered a case for women's advancement in this area, claiming that if women were given equal opportunity to participate in decision-making, society would be a better place. Women's presence in significant number in elected bodies and in economic institutions can result in more equitable policy outcome because, it is likely to encourage policy makers to give more attention to issues affecting women, such as equal pay, better conditions of employment, child-care, violence against women, and unpaid labour. And economic policies are also more likely to acknowledge the value of unpaid care work (Most of which are done by women) as an economic asset to be maintained and developed (Mill, 2008). But how has Mill's liberal principles been applicable in the context of Africa, and particularly in Nigeria? What has been Nigeria's experience since its return to democratic rule in 1999?

Nigeria, as Africa's most populous nation and vibrant democracy faces significant challenges regarding gender inclusion in its political processes (Mbah & Oti, 2015) despite constitutional guarantee of gender equality, women continue to be marginalized in political decision-making, holding limited positions of power and influence (Ihemeje, 2016; Ako-Na & Obamamoye, 2018). According to an official report by INEC, verifiable data obtained from the 2019 general election showed that, out of 469 seats in the National Assembly, women's representation was just around 6.2 percent in both House of Representatives and Senate (INEC, 2020). This statistics of women under-representation in the highest representative body of the Nigerian state is further amplified in a recent report by the National Bureau of Statistics. According to this report, since independence and Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 to the election in 2019, women have never been appointed as secretary to the government of the federation, nor elected as President or Vice President. Also, between 2007 – 2011, women's share in the National Assembly was around 7.2 percent, while it recorded around 6.6 percent between 2011 – 2015 and 2015 – 2019 respectively (NBS, 2021). This gender exclusion poses a fundamental challenge to

the principles of democracy, fairness, and representation as contemplated by John Stuart Mill (Lanre – Abass, 2012).

Historically, Nigerian women have played crucial roles in various social and political movements, advocating for equality and justice (Olanrewaju, 2018). However, their participation in formal political structures has been hindered by a range of barriers, including cultural norms, negative narratives about women, discriminatory practices, and limited resources (Tunbosun, 2020). These barriers combine to prevent women from effectively contesting elections, securing party nominations, and gaining visibility within the political landscape (Yola & Azeez, 2018).

Studies (Azuh et al 2016; Iyunade, 2020) suggest that the under-representation of women in Nigerian democracy has far reaching implications. It limits the diversity of perspectives and experiences in policy making, which in turn affects the responsiveness of democratic governance. Women's voices and interest often go unheard, leading to policies and legislations that do not adequately address their needs. This not only perpetuates gender inequalities but also undermines the legitimacy and inclusivity of Nigerian democracy as a whole (Awumah, et al, 2020; ferin, et al. 2020).

In response to these challenges, Scholars, activists and policy makers have called for greater inclusivity in Nigerian politics. Such responses have resonated with efforts to address gender disparity through legal frameworks, such as gender quota and affirmative action policies (Ekpe, 2016; Okorie, 2016; Ako-Na & Obamamoye, 2018). However, despite these initiatives, progress has been slow and gender exclusion persists (African Renewal, 2015 p.10). In spite of the clamour for women's political empowerment by international organizations, research consistently shows that in many parts of the world, women still linger on the fringes of political realm and their participation in government structures and the democratic process remains low (Vissandjee et al, 2016).

In Nigeria, although women constitute fifty (50) percent of the population and fifty-one (51) percent of voters during and in elections, yet they do not enjoy their full political rights as their male counterparts (Ofong, 2002; INEC, 2021; NBS, 2021). Available statistics reveal that women's overall political representation in government is less than (7) seven percent (INEC, 2021; NBS, 2022).

While having more women in leadership positions does not necessarily guarantee that women's concerns will be on the agenda, there is however, evidence suggesting that once a critical mass of women-over-one-third- is in power, their shared interests as women start to come to the fore. Ako-Nai & Obamamoye, (2018) hence suggested that the increased involvement of women in the democratic process is essential to broadening and deepening the Nigerian government's commitment to democratic governance, which by extension allows for diversity and participation of different groups. Women can therefore only make meaningful impact after they have reached the critical mass needed. Not only are women's participation and leadership an essential prerequisite for poverty alleviation and tackling gender inequality. It is also a basic human right. International human-rights treaties and conventions such as convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing platform for Action, the third

Millennium Development Goal on gender equality, and item 5 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, recognised that women have the right to participate equally with men at all levels and in all aspects of public life and decision-making whether it is deciding on how household income is spent or determining on how the country is to be run, and such conventions commit signatories to realizing this goal (Okorie, 2016). Despite these commitments to promoting gender equality and formal structures of representation and decision-making, women have not still attained the recommended thirty (30) percent seats in government as prescribed by the Beijing platform of Action to which Nigeria Subscribes (Ekpe, 2016). As a result, Ferri, Fraile, Garcia – Albacete, et al, (2020) summarized that women continue to be under-represented in areas of decision-making and face significant barriers to their full and equal participation in the structures and institutions. The question as to why gender differentials in every sphere of political representation remain persistent in Nigeria leaves much to be desired, thus creating a research gap.

However, to contribute to the discourse on gender exclusion in Nigeria's Democracy, this research draws on the liberal political theory of John Stuart Mill, whose principles of liberty and equality provide valuable framework for analyzing and addressing gender disparities within democratic systems. By exploring the intersection between gender politics and J.S. Mills Liberal Political theory, this research aims to shed light on the causes and consequences of gender exclusion and propose strategies to foster gender inclusivity in Nigerian democracy.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

POLITICS

Politics is the struggle for power and determination of fate. Politics is the contextual involvement of many for the benefit of a few in a state, community and organization. Politics is a formal or informal process of resolving contradictions within a given society by the very few or generality of the masses for the benefit of the selected or nominated few or the people of that society. Again, politics is a process of decision-making in the family, church, organization and society at large; hence, politics is said to be ubiquitous. Therefore, it is important to participate in politics because, the formulated rules, decisions and laws are binding on all within that particular society. Politics is not a sentimental game as such because the cardinal areas of politics is centered on interest of the individual or group of individuals in a political party or interest in favour of the opposing candidate or party. It is so glaring that politics is of general interest of all, both the contestants, participants, and those that are non-participants because politics matters so much that it is unavoidable due to our quests, needs and desires in life. Over and above all, politics is about reconciliation of diverse interests. Politics is the influential suppression of others to be in agreement with the suppressor's agenda, intentions, proposals and submissive stand on a matter under contest, or moves intended to embark on or sanctionable decisions made seeking for support. Politics can equally be seen as tactical intellectual activities that determine the processes of settlement, earned entitlement, procedure of government, governance and human conduct in a given society. Institution, state or country. Politics can be politically, intellectually, socially, economically, environmentally and financially expressed based on the issue of discourse or the considerate matter to be determined at any given point in time in a family, community, institution, state or the country at large (MacAlex – Achiulo, 2020 & 2021).

Furthermore, politics is a negotiative process, a mediative process, as well as an advocative process, hence there are politics of resistance, negotiations, mediations and advocacies. Politics is a process that can be adopted in different dimensions in a bit to achieve or resolve conflictual issues between parties or group of parties, individuals or groups of individuals, organisations and nations to maintain peace and orderliness in a society as to foster harmonious co-existence that enhances developmental drive. The dynamics of power rest on political position, which made it a die-hard struggle for some individuals by all possible means to get political positions and reign supreme (MacAlex Achinulo, 2021).

Again, politics revolves around power. It concerns the production, distribution and use of resources in the course of social existence. Politics is power structured relationship. Leading scholars of the power approach to politics believe that politics is in essence power: the ability to achieve a desired outcome through whatever means. This notion was neatly summed up in Harold Lasswell's book, *Politics: who gets what, when and how?* (Lasswell, 1965). From this perspective, politics suggests diversity and conflict, but the essential ingredient is the existence of scarcity: the simple fact that, while human needs and desires are infinite, the resources available to satisfy them are always limited. Politics can therefore be seen as a struggle over scarce resources and power can be seen as the means through which this struggle is conducted.

Gender may influence people's understanding of an interest in politics, and it could do so in different ways; first, gender could affect how people define politics, with men being more likely than women to associate politics with partisan politics, representation, and conflict over resources, and women being more likely than men to associate politics with their closest concerns as citizens, including gender-related issues and specific welfare issues and policies. Second, even if both genders share the same abstract understanding of politics, they might be particularly interested in different political issues. Third, these processes might contribute to explain the gender gap in general political interest. In other words, women might express lower levels of general interest in politics because they do not define politics in the same way as men do, or/and because the standard indicator of political interest is better equipped to capture interest in male dominated topics.

GENDER

In recent feminist literature, the word sex denotes only the biological differences between men and women, whereas, gender should be understood as the social difference between them. The term gender identity was first introduced by Stoller (1968), when he argued that sex is a biological ascription whereas, gender is the result of psychological factors in terms of masculinity and femininity.

Gender emphasizes the social construction of differences between men and women in different societies. Differences which translate in practice into inequality in resources, responsibilities, opportunities and constraint. And thus, gender analysis has to take into account the fact that these differences and inequalities are not uniform across the factors as cultural context, levels of development and the policy environment. It can be argued that gender relations are not important branch of gender discussions. Pollert's (1996) view is that "Gender relations are everywhere; the close interrogation of social process, not the juggling of empty categories, will unravel them,

although gender relations are constructed and reconstructed at both a material and ideological level and are a constitutive part of class”.

Gender issues draw attention to instances of widespread and pervasive prejudice against women. Thus, much of the interest in gender relations over the last few decades have been mentioned by feminism, even if the term gender has been widely used. Gender relations have been portrayed as issues of inequality and subordination by feminists of all stories (Sarker, 2006; Waylem, 1996). As a result, there is currently an international consensus that gender equity should be an aim of (a country's development (ferrant, 2011). Additionally, feminist academics hence worked to ensure that gender analysis is included into all aspects of development plans and programmes, particularly in developing nations (Sarker, 2006). However, gender is not simply a categorization of the social world into two perspectives as some may be inclined to do (Connell, 1985; Millet, 1970). As one scholar rightly put it:

gender is a socially imposed division of the sexes... men and women are coursed, different. But they are not as different as day and night, earth and sky, yin and yang, life and death. In fact from the standpoint of nature, men and women are closer to each other than either is to anything else – for instance, mountains, kangaroos, or coconut palms. This idea that men and women are more different from one another than either is from anything else must come from somewhere other than nature” (Rothenberg, 1998 p.9).

The exigencies of what is termed social order, marks the gender concept emergence for the issue on ideal division of labour on food production and the replenishment of new members through reproduction. This has been reinforced by mostly the boundary lines created by both religion and cultural factoral representations; which determines what can be seen as demanding or demanded, permitted or what typified a tabooed actions for any gender. However, political power, the idea of control of the scarce resources, as well as violence uphold the entire gender current social order inspite of the resistances and actual rebellion activities. (Rothenberg, 1998).

Again, some factors necessitate the disparity between men and women particularly, when it comes to political activities. Political exclusion the female gender can be viewed in consideration of the type of government and political system practiced in such a country. One could be that it is an authoritarian system of government that have discouraged an inclusive participation, based on different degrees of involvement by both sexes; another can be when there is a statutory declaration or formulated law that certain aspects of life activities should be set aside for the man, as it claims man's world and then other inappropriate activities be for the women, and an outright women's political involvement being overlooked base on the interpretation that women are for social order and not political activities. These are supported by political corruption autonomizing the political activities and even the political area to be for men and not women (Graske, 1999).

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The concept of political participation represents the degree of political involvement of individuals both genders and citizens of any country in their country's political activities, political parties, as well as governance, so as to make inputs and create innovative means of achieving good

governance that will take care of the citizens' welfare and protect their life and property as a state's responsibility stipulated. It is a process of political activities where various individuals, both male and female have to showcase the roles of which they are capable to handle as part of their political life. This process avails an individual an opportunity of being among those who will be involved in decision-making to achieve the common objectives of the people for the general good of everybody in the polity and of the state. It equally showcase the political behaviour of a people in political matters and at the same time help to nurture the political culture of the people based on over the years of electionary campaigns, votings, declaration of results and swearing in for proper governance. It is a basic requirement of all adult citizens in a democratic dispensation, precisely, as a fundamental prerequisite expected for a citizen to contribute to the growth and development of the state. However, Falade, (2008) was able to identify about six different methods of involvement by political participants (both the candidates and the electorates). First is the ones tagged the inactive sets of people that are not involved in any way in political matters; the second type is those that get involved in voting process and after that, marks their end of involvement and as such become part of the critics that evaluate and criticize the government. While the selfish participants, which he tagged parochial participants are those who do actually participate in politics as to protect their selfish interests in politics from time to time; then the communists are those that apparently loves participating in continuous voting, and also do get involved in the political party campaigns. Whereas, the campaigners are those that are dead serious in participating in any political campaign, but they are not concerned with community matters. And then the main, complete activists that are highly neck deep involved in political activities including viewing for a political position, campaigning, community affairs, and activities in contact with the general public. In addition, there are basic forms of constraints, which are thus; determinants of political participation are; cultural belief system, lack of economic empowerment, political alignment of godfatherism, religious inclinations and biases against other religions, as well as educational qualifications of candidates, most importantly. The most important is the political awareness and charismatic quality of good repute, that will motivate people to vote or belong to the party where such admirable candidate belongs. By that means and ways confidence is being bestowed on the person/candidate, party and their anticipated chances of winning and retaining power of governance of the state.

Furthermore, the participation in the policy agenda, the limitations of procedural forms of democracy in which the populace participates in politics, solely through voting every four or five years, have been extensively debated. As a necessary complement to proceduralism, the idea that voters and voter associations must be permitted to engage in policy debates between elections is offered. Although, J. S. Mill was late convert to the idea of public participation, he believed that while elections were necessary, it remained an insufficient condition for representative democracy (Mill, 1986). He outlined additional conditions necessary for popular government. According to him, representational democracy requires citizens to have an ongoing capacity for participation. This participation necessitates a democratic constitution that is backed up by "detailed democratic institutions... representational democracy must be reinforced by more participatory modes of political action" (Krouse, 1982p. 529). These forms of local participation, according to Mill, is the primary tool of representative democracy, without which voters have few or no opportunities to engage in activities other than voting and political discussion. This is an instructional function as

it serves as a training ground for citizens to learn about governance. As a result, he contended, voting for representative is insufficient to ensure the formation of a properly formed popular government.

Dahl (cited in Saward, 2000), he expanded on this further by emphasizing the centrality of political equality in representative democracy. Dahl believes that democratic citizens must have a formal say in policy-making. In this regard, systems are necessary to enable citizens to express their preferences not just for representatives, but also for agendas or policies. He cited as examples special initiatives, such as referendums and representative recalls. As a result, he called for constitutional provisions allowing individuals to recall elected politicians and change government policies as a means of exercising influence over the agenda. As Charney (1991) noted, deliberative democracy theorists “emphasize the importance of a free public sphere distinct from the state and economy in which citizens can freely debate, deliberate and engage in collective democratic formation” (Charney, 1999 p.1). He argued that deliberative democracy is made feasible by the diverse associational life that constitutes civil society. According to him, the reason that the deliberative model of democracy is able to dispense with the pretense of mass assembly in that it locates the public realm within civil society “(Charney, 1999).

ELECTIVE POLITICS

Elective politics signifies those type of politics played by the elected politicians in all political processes in a state. This set of elected politicians comprise both the elected representatives and that of the executives, because they made up what constitutes formidable arbitrators and decision-makers in the political arena. Elective politics can be dominated by the draconian and dictatorship executive in governance (Stafford, 2022). However, elective politics means “an elective post or committee, which people are appointed as a result of winning an election” (Collins, 2019). Elective politics is quite a discretionary and optional type of politics, the men capitalize on this, to view elective political post or position to be for the men alone, because for them women are unfit or relegated to the societal or cultural constraints which placed women with no option to choose what they are capable of doing or not. Moreover, elective politics is predominant in a democratic system of government, where representative democracy is extensive and expensive, thus the term has been explained differently by different scholars. Representative democracy has been equally defined as a form of government where elected representatives act on behalf of the people in making decisions and formulating policies Stoctzer et al. (2022). It is a form of governance in which the people exercise their right to make political decisions through their elected representatives. In this way, the people elect their leaders to the representative bodies. In Nigeria as in other democracies, this system involves periodic elections and the selection of political leaders to represent the interest of the citizens.

Barisha, (2011) observed that the very essence of representative democracy lies in the fact that the will of the people is fulfilled through representative bodies directly elected by the citizens themselves. Thus, the highest state body, elected by the people is accountable to the people and is obliged to act in accordance with the interests of the later.

Akamere, (2015) sees representative democracy as a system in which citizens of the State take part in government not directly but through representatives chosen by them. Akamere further suggested that the working of this system can be greatly enhanced if the country is defined to or divided into a number electoral districts or constituencies based on relatively equal population in which each constituency elects one or two representatives to the parliament. This brings to the fore the presence of three pre-conditions for the survival of representative democracy first, there has to be an opportunity for genuine competition in the selection of leadership if people think that elections are rigged, or predetermined, there can be no meaningful honest competition. Secondly, there has to be free communications, both among the people and in the press. Thirdly, voters have to believe that a meaningful choke exists between candidates and that differences in policy are honestly reflected in each. The degree to which these three factors are present, go a long way to determining the effectiveness of a representative democracy. These factors are further expanded to include equality in voting, effective participation, enlightened understanding citizens control of the agenda and inclusion (must be open to all citizens within a nation).

Mill, a proponent of representative democracy, focused mainly on how to ensure efficient government and respect for personal rights and freedoms, where the Frenchman, Charles Louis de Montesquieu created ideas on democracies, which are still characteristics of modern democracies. Montesquieu spread the idea of a representative democracy, whereby the people would elect their own representatives to make decisions and promulgate Laws. Representative democracy has become indispensable for democracies, where citizens find it easier to make decisions. Thus, Montesquieu spread the idea of power sharing as well, whereby the separation of powers meant that the legislature (parliament), the executive branch (Government) and the Judiciary (the Courts) must be completely, to a relative extent, separated and have the power to control each other (IDEA, 2004 p.26).

Bajrami, (2005) avers that the very essence of representative democracy consists in the fulfillment of the will of the majority of citizens, through institutions and representative bodies directly elected by the people. Though the sovereignty and governance of the people is not directly exercised by the people but through the representative bodies elected by the people and empowered by their mandate to govern the state. One of the main concerns expressed by political theorists about representation relates to the control of the democratic agenda. Representatives tend to reflect their own enlightened self interest in parliament and not necessarily those of the people over whom they represent (Dahl 1989; Michels, 1962).

DEVELOPMENT

Development is quality and standardized improvement in a very advanced stage that begins with human beings and as well ends with them, for the entire benefits of every man. Development is a good and ideal process that entails the achievement of economic growth to be a necessary condition that will facilitate the entire achievement of socio-economic, socio-political and the environmental qualitative advanced growth process, in good synergy with the required human capital development that is acquired through adequate and well organized, founded education, that will in turn, spur the entire process of including women in the scheme of things in relation to elective political representative in the state. This helps to ameliorate the continuous broadened gaps of

inequality, unemployment and poverty rate, which represents the criteria for measuring development of a people, society and state at large (Seers, 1969).

Furthermore, Development is a term that everybody talks about, gets involved and are concerned about because, it starts with man and actually ends with man in man's favour or demerits, when it is not properly planned up for over time in a society. Development is not one side improvement or a sectoral advancement, rather, it is an upward balanced type of man's improvement that actually touches man's concern in all ramifications. This ranges from man's basic needs, comprising; food, shelter, clothing, good and quality health, proper educational training and environmental friendliness of his surroundings within the particular vicinity and also beyond the concerned environment to the larger areas of the state. It is so because development is equally a political phenomenon, as well as its activities, hence in Nigeria, there have been series of development plans to heat up Nigeria and Nigerians on the development ladder of assertion. For example; all the National development plans of Nigerian Federal government started from that of 1962 – 1968 NDP to that of 1980 – 1985 NDP, which were all long term development plans, prior to annual/polling plans that federal government of Nigeria from year to year make budget for its implementation, for the good Nigerians (MacAlex – Achinulo, 2023). Women involvement in elective political representative democracy and involvement in decision making, as well as policy formulations for the development of state and citizens.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research adopted the liberal feminist theory. The liberal feminism is the emerging variant of mainstream feminism that spotlighted gender inequality and women's liberation within the context of liberal democracy. This theory was propounded by Mary Wolstonecraft in 1792. In her book, *The Vindication of the Rights of Women*". Wolstonecraft, (1792), she argued that women have the capacity to be equal partners with their male counterparts in the society.

Furthermore, in view of the subjection of women, Mill argued that women should have the same legal and political rights as men, emphasizing the principle of equality. He stated that laws and social customs that limit women's rights are unjust and hinder the progress of society. Again, Mill argued for the fundamental equality of men and women, advocating that both should have equal rights, opportunities and access to education and public life. He rejected traditional gender roles that confined women to domestic sphere and sought to challenge societal norms that limited women's autonomy and opportunities. Mill supported the expansion of political rights to women and argued for women's suffrage. He believed that women's participation in politics and decision-making processes was crucial for achieving a fair and just society.

Snow's study embraces Mills views on women's virtues and equality of reason by comparing Rousseau's *Emile*, which defines the identity of women as chaste, gentle, dutiful, wives and good mothers. He quotes Rousseau's text, "Nature herself has decreed that women, both for herself and her children should be at the mercy of man's judgment" which depicts the authoritarian nature of men under patriarchy (Snow, 2002). The study of Arifatin (2019) addresses the problem of gender stereotyping in Japanese culture by portraying Mill's concept of liberal feminism. In contrast to

traditional practice, the heroin never fails to demonstrate her desire for independence and defies the stereotype that women should not be considered superior to men (Arifatin, 2019).

Moreover, the study of Michael (1987) employs Mill's view points and ideologies. The author points out the notion of liberal feminism beyond conventional patriarchal society and identifies special abilities beyond the male myths about women. Likewise, Delukman, (2018), in his study explains Mill's idea that women need to live a life of their own, shattering the constraints imposed by a society dominated by men through the concept of idea and language.

The relevance of the liberal feminist theory in this study holds some merits. First, the theory places emphasis on equality and individual rights. Liberal feminist theory aligns with the goal of promoting gender equality and ensuring the protection of women's individual rights within the context of representative democracy. Liberal feminism advocates for equal rights and opportunities for women, challenging gender-based discrimination and advocating for the dismantling of barriers that impede women's full participation in political and social spheres. By adopting a liberal feminist lens, the research aims to critically analyse the politics of gender exclusion in Nigeria and assess the extent to which liberal principles can address these issues. Secondly, the liberal feminist theory is compatible with liberal political theory. The research aims to explore the applicability of J.S. Mill's liberal political theory in addressing gender exclusion and women participation in elective politics in Nigerian democracy. Thirdly, liberal feminist theory recognizes that gender inequality are not solely the result the result of individual attitudes or cultural norms, but also stem from structural and institutional biases. Lastly, liberal feminist theory provides an analytical framework for interpreting empirical findings with a gender lens. By adopting this theoretical perspective, the research can analyse the experiences, challenges and aspirations of women in Nigerian politics, as well as the underlying power dynamics and social structures that influence their participation. This lens enables a nuanced understanding of the gender aspects of political processes and helps to identify areas for intervention and policy recommendations that align with the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study was survey research design and data for the study were all derived from secondary sources. Whereas, the method of analysis is qualitative/content analysis, which relies on data generated mostly from secondary sources. The research study area is Nigeria; however, the study area encompassed relevant political institutions, such as political parties, government bodies, and civil society, organization operating at the national, state and local levels. The research covered various regions and states in Nigeria, as to capture the geographical diversity and potential variations in gender exclusions in elective political participation experiences.

Moreover, the nature of the research was historical and archival. The study also made use of websites, reports of the rules and business committee and tables from department of the House of Representatives, books, newspapers, government records, as well as publications, other online resources, policy statements related to gender and democracy, and existing empirical studies on gender exclusion and political representations in Nigeria. Again, some of the secondary data generated were baseline data and represented in the form of tables and charts.

LEVEL OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN NIGERIA

Since Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, the male gender has been the major actors in politics and decision-making, especially where key policy decisions are made and resource allocations are decided. Despite the recognition of the importance of women's political empowerment as captured within the framework of the SDG goal 5, women have continued to suffer in all facets of politics and leadership. Women had rarely been represented in any of the three arms of government. As could be seen above, it is becoming a norm that men play the most important roles in politics, particularly at the federal level with regards to the position of President, Vice President and secretary to the government of the federation, as well as appointive and ministerial positions (NBS, 2021).

As it stands, gender representation in both appointive and elective positions suggests that women are still far behind. A review of the global trend in women parliamentary representation shows that although there has been significant improvement in the last two decades, even in African countries, however, not much progress has been made in Nigeria where women representation in the legislature, especially at the National Assembly, has not changed significantly since 1999.

The under-representation of women in politics is not peculiar to Nigeria. According to IPU, (2015) "the past two decades have witnessed an impressive rise in women's political representation around the world, with the global average in the share of women in national parliaments doubling during that time, and all regions making substantial progress towards the goal of 30 percent women's representation in decision making". Nowhere in the world has the rate of increase in the political representation of women been as rapid as in Sub-Sahara Africa. In 1995, no African country had elected more than 30% women to its single or lower houses, but by 2015, twelve countries elected more than 30% of women into such legislative houses; five elected more than 40%; while one (Rwanda) elected more than 60% (IPU, 2015 p.6).

A statistical report on women and men in Nigeria shows that representation of high-ranking government officials with decision-making powers are heavily lop sided in favour of men (NBS, 2017). In 1999, only sixteen (16) women were elected into the National Assembly, with thirteen (13) in the House of Representatives and three (3) in the Senate. The total number increased to 25% in 2003, with twenty-one (21) in the House of Representatives and four (4) in the Senate. The highest number of women ever to be elected into the National Assembly was Thirty (30) in 2007, with twenty-seven in the house of representative and nine (9) into the Senate. Since then, it has witnessed a steady decline – thirty-two (32) in 2011, twenty-nine (29) in 2015 and seventeen (17) in 2019.

Again, it is evident that representation of women in the executive arm of government in Nigeria has equally been very low. There has neither been a woman President nor Vice-President. Glaringly, it is cleared and showed that the current status quo with regards to gender representation as President or Vice President, with all the positions were held by men.

In addition, the number of women appointed into ministerial positions have not increased significantly since 1999 as it has remained between 5 (in 2015) to the highest of 15 in 2011 (NBS, 2012). Similarly, in Nigeria, women have never been appointed as secretaries to the government

of the federation since independence. While very few women have been appointed into top government and senior administrative positions since 1999.

Moreover, in the judiciary, the level of participation of women in the judiciary has been very low. The number of women judges have equally been low in federal courts from 2011-2016. Again, when it come to the sub-national level, the number of women elected into executive positions has remained really low. Therefore, at any rate, the position of western scholars who have suggested that if developing countries apply democratic principles, it will end underdevelopment and promote gender equality, deserves a re-evaluation. The point is that the reality of women's political under-representation in Nigeria is a paradox to this expectation. Since the return to democracy since the last twenty years, there has been no female President, Vice President, Senate President or Secretary to the Government. The nearest a woman came to the apex of leadership of government was the first female speaker of the house of representatives and the only one in the last twenty years – Mrs. Patricia Etteh, and even then, her inglorious exit which was intertwined with gender and patriarchal dynamics remain debatable.

Lastly, the gender disparity is further reflected in the male to female ratio representing each of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Presently, there is only one female Senator. Binta Masi, out of the 57 Senators in the 19 States in Northern Nigeria (Vanguard newspaper, 2017). At the state level, no female governor since 1999 till date except for Virginia Etiaba, who acted for few months as governor of Anambra state at the time. There have been only few female Deputy Governors (presently four) out of the thirty-six (36) states in Nigeria and most of the States' House of Assembly remain largely male dominated.

In the appointment of women into cabinet at state level, the situation is the same with extreme instance of Adamawa state in 2015 appointment of a man named Aliyu Tola as commissioner for women and social development. A position that traditionally has always been reserved for the few women appointed to positions in politics of Nigeria (Dan-Fulani, 2015). Below are certain, different tables that will elucidate the gross inequality that has been metted upon the women in elective political positions in both federal and state governments.

Table 1: Trends in number of women Deputy Governors in Nigeria since 1999-2019

ELECTION YEAR	NO. OF WOMEN DEPUTY GOVERNORS
1999	1
2003	3
2007	6
2011	1
2015	4
2019	4

Source: Adapted from Poopola (2021) and compiled by the Researcher, 2023.

Table 2: Gender representation in the senate and House of Representatives since 1999-2019

Election Year	109 Senate Seats				360 House of Representative Seats			
	M	%	W	%	M	%	W	%
1999	106	97.2	3	2.8	347	96.4	13	3.6
2003	105	96.3	4	3.7	339	94.2	21	5.8
2007	100	91.7	9	8.3	333	92.5	27	7.5
2011	102	93.5	7	6.5	335	93.1	25	6.9
2015	102	93.5	7	6.5	338	94	22	6
2019	102	93.5	7	6.5	350	97.2	10	2

Source: NBS, 2023

Table 3: Number of Senators occupying principal positions at the National Assembly by type of office, sex and year (Senator House)

Type of Office	2016		2017		2018		2019	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Senate President	1		1		1		1	
Deputy Sen. President	1		1		1		1	
Dep. Sen. Majority leader	1		1		1		1	
Majority Sen. Leader	1		1		1	1		1
Dep. Min. Sen. Leader	1		1		1		1	
Chief. Whip	1		1		1		1	
Dep. Chief Whip	1		1		1		1	
Minority Whip	1		1		1		1	
Dep. Minority Whip	1		1		1		1	
Committee Chair person	63	6	63	6	63	6	63	6
Total	73	6	73	6	72	7	72	7

Source: National Assembly, 2022

Table 4: Number of members occupying principal position at the National Assembly by type of office, sex, ad year (House of Representatives).

Type of Office	2016		2017		2018		2019	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Speaker	1		1		1		1	
Dep. Speaker	1		1		1		1	
House of Majority Leader	1		1		1		1	
Dep. House Majority leader	1		1		1		1	
House Minority Leader	1		1		1		1	
Dep. House Min. Leader	1		1		1		1	
House Chief whip	1		1		1		1	
Dep. House Chief Whip	1		1		1		1	
House Minority Whip	1		1		1		1	
Dep. House Minority Whip		1		1		1		1
Committee chairpersons	88	8	88	8	88	8	88	8
Total	97	9	97	9	97	9	97	9

Source: National Assembly, 2022

Table 5: Distribution of the number of occupying elective positions as President and Vice President in the executive arm and number of available seats (1999-2019)

	1999-2003		2003-2007		2007-2011		2015-2019		2019-2023	
	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%
Position		F		F		F		F		F
President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Vice President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0

Source: NBS, 2022 as adapted from the Office of Secretary of the Government of the Federation (OSGF), 2021

Table 6: Appointive ministerial political position by sex (1999-2019)

1999		2003		2007		2011		2015		2019	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
89	11	38	4	83	12	53	15	31	5	36	7

Source: NBS, 2023

Table 7: Distribution of Secretaries to the Government of the Federation from 1999-2019

Sex	1999	2007	2008	2011	2015	2019
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Male	1	1	1	1	1	1
Female	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: office of Secretary to the Government of Federation, 2021

Table 8: Top Government officials and senior administrators, 1999-2015

Position	Male	%	Female	%
Head of Service	9	75	3	25
Permanent secretary	95	86	15	14
Special Adviser	27	77	8	23
Special Assistant	98	72	38	28
Central Bank	4	100	0	0
Chief Executive Officer	307	87	44	13
Director General	114	90	12	10
Executive Secretary	29	78	8	22

Source: NBS, 2017

Table 1-8 showed the disparity and the over-whelming level of inequality between the men and the women in elective political positions in Nigeria that cut across all levels of elective political position. These implied that, women are grossly discriminated, marginalized and excluded in elective political context during elections over the years, in the governance positions.

Table 9: outline of women representation in 2019 elections

Position	Total No. of Candidates	Number of Positions	No. Of Women	%	APC Female Candidates	PDP Female Candidates	Total Women Elected
President	73	1	6	8.22	0	0	0
Vice President	73	1	22	30.13	0	0	0
Senate	1,904	109	235	12.34	7	10	7
House of Reps.	4,680	360	533	11.39	15	16	11
Governor	2,412	36	74	3.07	0	0	0
Deputy Governor	2,412	36	275	11.49	2	3	4
State Assembly	14,583	944	1,825	12.51	28	39	40
Total	26,137	1,487	2,970	11.36	52	68	62

Source: Centre for democracy and development, 2019

The above table 9 showed the number, as well as the percentage of women involved in elective political positions in Nigeria's democratic dispensation that have spanned from 1999 to 2019 with

women being drastically excluded in elective political positions against the gender equality that has been ringing a bell across the globe.

CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN TO THE SUSTENANCE OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

Over the years, women in Nigeria have been relegated to the background and are circumscribed within the political arena by structures, procedures and ideologies that favor men, as well as the existence of an invisible glass ceiling that block their upward inability and full participation. Despite the difficulties faced by women, they continue with their political ambition, contributing enormously to politics and the democratic process with a view to advancing national development. Women played important roles in the struggle for independence. They wrote petitions, staged protests, mobilized and challenged all forms of oppression and suppression which permeated their economic, socio-cultural and political spaces. Also, during the years of military rule, a different scene took place, where a significant number of Nigerian women stood their ground across governance strata, and spoke truth to power. Since protracted military rule was ended in 1999, previously marginalized population and segments of the country have gained the confidence to participate in governance, however, the going has been so slow for women in Nigerian politics.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, findings have shown that some impediments to women participation and representation in governance, such as gender bias and cultural stereotype in Nigerian society; public attitude not only determines how many females candidates won a general election but also, directly and indirectly, determine how many are considered and nominated for office; because some cultures believe that it is an abomination for a woman to lead men. The study also found out that the political environment poses a huge challenge for women to actively participate in Nigerian politics. Moreover, due to the perception and the social stigma that politics is a dirty game, women who venture into politics are wrongly perceived as arrogant and irresponsible. Then, considering the financial backing, the godfathers and other party financiers in Nigeria prefer male political aspirants to female ones, based on the societal value assumption and political activities are masculine and male candidates are believed to stand a better chance of winning elections. Therefore, it is so glaring that the discrimination against women has its roots in the nature of our societies which celebrate men as being unique, stronger and fit for the public space, while the women are fragile and meant to confine within the confluence of the private space.

In summary, everyone should be accorded equal opportunity to attain the highest political position in the country without any restriction, irrespective of what is attached thereto. If the highest position in the country is made open to all, it then follows that there is no close stratification in Nigeria, as no establishment or institution is reserved for some class of persons in the country. It is open to all the citizenry, the only limitation to get to the apex of the country's stratification should be the person and not any imposition by law or convention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends as follows;

1. Gender sensitive and equitable policies in the agenda and operations of political parties should be promulgated and their implementation monitored.
2. Gender policies must be implemented and media should recognize women politicians, their voices, their contributions in decision making, as well as highlight women's issues.
3. Voter education must capture the global quest for gender party and place it in local contexts.
4. There is need to strengthen key democratic institutions to execute gender equality laws and to strengthen the capacity of democratic process to guarantee women's rights. The capacity of courts, electoral commission and the police need to be enhanced to redress the concern of women whose rights have been violated. This will help to bring perpetrators to book and serve as warning to the potential violations of women's rights, thus, guaranteeing gender equality and right in Nigeria.

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