

Women's Involvement and Participation in Nigerian Politics: Hurdle and Amelioration

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DOI: 10.56201/jpslr.v9.no2.2023.pg70.91

ABSTRACT

Despite clamours for improvement in women participation in public life across the world, Nigeria appears to be moving in the wrong direction. The contributions of women participation in the Nigerian politics following the country's return to democracy in 1999 has brought into new focus, questions about the factors hindering women's political participation in the country. Twenty-four years (1999–2023) after the transfer of power from the military regime to a civilian democratic administration, women still remain at the side-line of Nigeria's politics, hence the need to undertake a study on hurdle and amelioration of women's involvement and participation in politics. There are several constraints to women's participation in Nigerian politics, which includes cultural and social norms, lack of access to education and resources, political violence, thuggery, discrimination etc. to mention a few. The under representation of women in political participation gained root due to the patriarchal practice inherent in our society, much of which were obvious from the pre-colonial era till date. The study recommended that to gain the necessary leadership qualities, women should choose to pursue positions of leadership in both the public and private sectors and should educate themselves to the highest levels. To reduce illiteracy and prepare female students for future leadership duties, parents, especially those in rural areas, should be urged to enrol their female children in school. The study also recommended that the current women empowerment policy be reviewed to reflect the actual situation and that government should also establish a network of women leaders so that women can share their leadership successes and challenges to inspire other women who aspire to be leaders.

KEYWORDS: *Gender Equality, Politics, Women, Electoral Process, Patriarchal, Political activist and political participation*

INTRODUCTION

In many countries, women have been underrepresented in the government and different institutions. This historical tendency still persists, although women are increasingly being elected to be heads of state and government. As of October 2019, the global participation rate of women in national-level parliaments was 24.5%. In 2013, women accounted for 8% of all national leaders and 2% of all presidential posts. Furthermore, 75% of all female prime ministers and presidents have taken office in the past two decades. Women may face a number of challenges that affect their ability to participate in political life and become political leaders. Several countries are exploring measures that may increase women's participation in government at all levels, from the local to the national and international. However, more women are pursuing leadership positions in the present day.

Despite clamours for improvement in women participation in public life across the world, Nigeria appears to be moving in the wrong direction. Women have remained a vastly underrepresented minority in the halls of political power throughout Nigerian history. Since the resumption of electoral democracy in 1999, public campaigns, proposed legislative reforms and internal measures within political parties have attempted to address the gaping gender imbalance. Yet assessments of the performance of female candidates in Nigeria's most recent general elections revealed a disturbing trend: women's representation in elected and appointed office has not only failed to increase but appears to be in decline. As part of its wider interest in understanding the nature of electoral democracy and citizen participation in Nigeria, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) commissioned a series of studies on women's participation following Nigeria's 2019 elections. The first of these, entitled "How Women Fared in the 2019 Elections", considered the scale and performance of women candidates in the last general elections. The second, "Gendered Contests: Women in Competitive Politics: An analysis of women's participation in the 2019 Nigerian general elections", conducted alongside John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism, pursued a mixed-methods approach to assess how both subjective perceptions and objective factors contributed to the dramatic under-representation of women among those who campaigned for elected office in 2019. A third study, conducted in partnership with African Polling Institute (API), sought to "This primarily quantitatively study, entitled "Women in Nigerian Politics: A citizen's perception" survey on the attitudes of Nigerians towards female candidates in the political space, surveyed 7,396 persons (roughly 49% female and 51% male) between September 2019 and June 2020 conducted using a stratified quota sampling technique, it covered all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, offering a robust, nationally representative sample exploring citizen's perceptions of women's participation in electoral politics.

Under international standards, both men and women should have equal rights and opportunities to everything worldwide, most especially to participate fully in all aspects and at all levels of political processes. According to Afolabi et al. (2003), Globally, women constitute over half of the world's population and contribute in vital ways to societal development generally. In most societies, women assume some key roles, which are: mother, producer, home-manager, community organizer, socio-cultural and political activists. Of these many roles mentioned, the last has been engendered by women movement. In line with global trends, Nigerian women constitute nearly half of the population of the country. But despite the major roles they play with their population, women roles in the society are yet to be given recognition. This is due to some cultural stereotypes, abuse of religion, traditional practices, and patriarchal societal

structures. In Nigeria, the awareness about the role of women in the development of a nation came up in the 1980s. The International Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 enhanced the effective participation of women in politics in Nigeria. It emphasized equal participation of women in decision-making bodies, marked the beginning of the golden age of women. It also implied that difficulties facing society should be balanced between men and women. The main metrics for measuring effective leadership -participatory leadership, accountability, and transparency - call for gender parity in leadership opportunities (Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2015). To ensure that women have the chance to engage in leadership, Nigeria has ratified a variety of international, regional, and national legislation; yet, these laws are only put into practice on paper.

In Nigeria, about 51 percent of women are involved in voting during elections. Despite these, women are still underrepresented in both elective and appointive positions. Available statistics revealed that overall political representation in the government of Nigeria is less than 7 percent (Agbalajobi, 2010). This shows that Nigeria has not attained 30 percent affirmative as prescribed by the Beijing Platform of Action. Nigeria has been recording low participation of women in both elective and appointive positions this is a growing concern to many Nigerians. However, concerted efforts have been made by government and non-governmental organizations to increase the level of participation of women in politics, in line, with the declaration made at the fourth World Conference on women in Beijing, which advocated 30% affirmative action. However, in Nigeria, the extant National Gender Policy (NGP) recommended 35% affirmative action instead and sought a more inclusive representation of women with at least 35% of both elective political and appointive public service positions respectively. The underrepresentation of women in political participation gained root due to the patriarchal practice inherent in our society, much of which was obvious from the pre-colonial era till date. However, the re-introduction of democratic governance has witnessed once again an increase in women political participation both in elective and appointive offices in Nigeria.

From 1999 till date, only 157 women have been elected into the 469-member National Assembly (38 senators and 119 members of the House of Representatives), compared to 2,657 men (616 senators, 2,041 reps) during the same period. The results of the 25 February presidential and National Assembly elections have further exposed Nigeria's failure to implement several treaties and statutes it signed, which are aimed at ensuring women's involvement in politics. Of the 92 women who contested for the Senate in the February elections, only three won, while out of the 286 who contested for seats in the House of Representatives, only 15 have been declared winners. The low number of women in elective and appointive positions in Nigeria is directly proportional to the level of development. Nigeria's political parties are not interested in prioritising issues of women's development, saying decisions still need to be made for women by men, even when women constitute a significant portion of the voting population.

Nigeria has been recording low participation of women in both elective and appointive positions. This is a growing concern to many Nigerians. However, concerted efforts have been made by government and non -governmental organizations to increase the level of participation of women in politics in line with the declaration made at the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, which advocated 30% affirmative action. In Nigeria, the extant National Gender Policy (NGP) recommended 35% affirmative action instead and sought a more inclusive representation of women with at least 35% of both elective political and

appointive public service positions respectively. The underrepresentation of women in political participation gained root due to the patriarchal practice inherent in our society, much of which was obvious from the pre-colonial era till date. However, the re-introduction of democratic governance has witnessed once again an increase in women political participation both in elective and appointive offices. The national average of women's political participation in Nigeria has remained at 6.7 percent in elective and appointive positions, which is far below the Global Average of 22.5 percent, the Africa Regional Average of 23.4 percent, and the West African Sub Regional Average of 15 percent. For instance, out of the 36 recently confirmed ministerial appointments by the administration now in power, only six (6) are women, representing 16.7 percent. In the National Assembly, women constitute 5.6 percent of members of the House of Representatives and 6.5 percent of the Senators. Also, with Twenty-four years of uninterrupted democratic governance (1999-2023), Nigeria was able to produce a female governor in one of the 36 states of the Federation in the just concluded 2023 general election. This paper seeks a critical review of the importance of data in monitoring women participation in politics in Nigeria vis -à-vis the affirmative declaration. Recently, the National Centre for Women Development embarked on the collection of national data on the involvement and participation of women in politics in Nigeria (1999 to 2015). One of the objectives of the data collection is to provide a baseline for the implementation of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The data collation of the exercise is ongoing. Hopes are high that the result will show the progress steadily made to achieving the affirmative declaration and determine how the gap that erstwhile existed has been closed as well as measure the variation between where we are and the affirmative action of 35 percent. Also, it will improve evidence-based planning and programming involving women in decision-making; increase the support of key stakeholders on measures to increase representation of women in decision -making and further improved awareness of new advocacy tools among stakeholders to support the campaign for increased representation of women in decision making in Nigeria. Women have remained a vastly underrepresented minority in the halls of political power throughout Nigerian history. Since the resumption of electoral democracy in 1999, public campaigns, proposed legislative reforms and internal measures within political parties have attempted to address the gaping gender imbalance. Yet assessments of the performance of female candidates in Nigeria's most recent general elections revealed a distributing trend: women's representation in elected and appointed office has not only failed to increase but appears to be in decline.

Political Platform

Ugo Aliogo (2022) in the study of impact of women in politics on development, argued that another partial reason for the low participation of women in electoral politics is due to the nature of the party platforms which are most likely to enable women contestants to get on the ballot. The study discovered that the vast majority of women candidates ran for office under the banner of 'third' parties, which are, parties other than the two largest political parties, the All-Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

According to the study, "Of the 232 female candidates that stood for senatorial contests across Nigeria, only 17 were candidates of the APC or the PDP. Other national electoral races had even higher proportions of third-party women candidates: nearly 94 percent of women candidates for the House of Representatives were from third parties, while, of the six women contestants for presidential office, no contender belonged to the APC or the PDP.

On one hand, the proliferation of parties other than the APC and the PDP — there were 89 alternative parties in the 2019 election has provided more opportunities for women to emerge as electoral candidates. Qualitative interviews with women political candidates also pointed to

the fact that smaller parties can provide a more flexible space for newly emerging female candidates to build electoral experience and a grassroots base outside of the traditional, more competitive party platforms. However, the higher proportion of female candidates in smaller parties has in fact deepened women's electoral marginalisation, since the vast majority of these parties either failed to attain any elective seats or ultimately.

Statistics of Women in 2023 Election

Current statistics has shown that there is a paltry 11.2 percent of female membership in both chambers of the Ninth National Assembly (seven females in the Senate and eleven in the House of Representatives), while in another report by the Women in Politics Forum (WIPF) titled: "Research on Interrogating the Policy Interventions to Increase Women's Participation in Governance in Nigeria," there were only 381 women among the total of 4,259 contestants for the presidential and the National Assembly seat in the year 2023 polls.

The report revealed that the development indicated the continuous marginalisation of women in the nation's political space; noting that out of the 18 political parties in the country, only the Allied People's Movement (APM) fielded a female presidential candidate.

For the Senate, it is observed that out of the 1,101 candidates vying for 109 Senatorial seats, 92 are women, representing 8.35 percent while 288 women are contesting for House of Representatives out of the total 3,122 candidates. According to the researcher, a state-by-state analysis shows that of the 36 states of Nigeria, including the Federal Capital Territory, five states did not field any woman as a candidate for the Senate while one State did not field any woman as a candidate for the House of Representatives.

Ifendu listed the states lacking in this regard as Kano, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe, and Zamfara for Senate and Jigawa for the House of Representatives. "This means that even without conducting elections, 13.5 percent of states will not have female representatives at the Senate while 2.7 percent of states will have no female representation at the House of Representatives," she said.

Expert Opinions

The likelihood for women in the 2023 election, looking at the numbers, shows they were greatly underrepresented. The situation for women looks gloomy, therefore, to understand how this challenge can be addressed, THISDAY spoke to the Country Director, Center for Development of Democracy (CDD), Idayat Hassan, who said one of the factors responsible, was the decline in political parties in 2019, adding that in the year under review, there were 91 political parties in contrast to the 18 political parties that would be contesting in 2023.

She further stated that following the release of the final list of candidates for the 2023 general election, the low representation of women can be seen, noting that there is a high decline from 2019 in the number of female nominations for all positions, as only 2.77 percent represent women candidates for the presidential seat with no party fielding a female as the vice-presidential candidate.

She remarked that in 2019, there were 8.22 percent and 30.13 percent of women aspirants for president and vice president respectively, noting that out of 1,101 candidates vying for 109 Senatorial seats in 2023, 92 are women, representing only 8.35percent, which she said was against 235 women (12.34percent) that were on the list in 2019.

She argued that 288 women are contesting for the House of Representatives out of 3,122 candidates also representing 9.2 percent, therefore noted in 2019, there were 533 (11.39 percent) women on the candidate list, "cumulatively, there are 381 women among the total of 4,259 contestants for the presidency and national assembly seats, and this is worrisome."

The CDD Country Director observed that in the general elections, approximately 416 candidates would run for governorship across the federation's 28 States while pointing out that

just 24 of them (six percent of the total) are women, which is a decrease in the overall number of female governorship candidates who ran in the 2019 governorship election, which was 85. Hassan added that the 24 women running for governor in 2023 are running in 17 States, with no female candidates in the remaining 11 states.

According to her, breaching the gap has to do with a lot of reorientations, particularly at the party level, political parties have to be strengthened and welcome implementation and inclusion within the party structure.

She maintained that the constitution of these parties has to be implemented as many have a quota system for inclusion, but the implementation of it is a challenge. Therefore, Citizens, women groups, and civil society organisations (CSOs) have been working in solidarity for certain bills that are gender representative.

Hassan revealed that in 2022, the National Assembly declined the bills, some of the bills looked at addressing some gender biases such as denying 35 percent appointed positions for women and settling for 20 percent, denying women affirmative action in party administration and leadership, denying specific seats for women in the National Assembly among others, “having some of these laws would have made tremendous strides in closing the gap for equality and parity.”

Continuing, she said that Nigerian women have excelled locally and have been recognised having gotten international recognitions in various other sectors from the financial institution to entertainment etc. So why not in politics the few women who have done tremendously having been allowed to serve have clearly shown their readiness, women like the late Dora Akunyili, who was the Director General of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration (NAFDAC), the current President of the World Trade Organisation Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iwela, who has served as a Nigeria Minister, Amina Mohammed who served as Minister of Environment. Also, at the global level, women are well represented holding the top office in countries like the longest prime minister of Bangladesh, New Zealand, Norway, Iceland, and among others.

“Nigeria society does not encourage women’s political leadership looking at the legislative laws in the country it does not favour or support women, the impact of culture and religion has also not helped and contributed as patriarchy has been a stumbling block to the progress of women in the society there is need for sensitization and awareness creations to combat the myths and disinformation that hampers women political participation,” Hassan further said.

Challenges against women’s active participation in politics

Several impediments have been identified as limiting the participation of women in the social, economic, and political scenes. The causes behind the underrepresentation of women in governmental positions are divided into two categories: supply and demand. Supply refers to women's general ambition to run for office and access to resources like education and time, while demand refers to elite support, voter bias, and institutional sexism. This intervention would focus on some distinctly Nigerian variants of these barriers.

Women face numerous obstacles in achieving representation in governance. The biggest challenges a woman in government can face occur during the pursuit of her position in a government office, as opposed to when she is upholding said position. One of the big challenges is financing a campaign. Studies also show that women running for political office raise a similar amount of money in comparison to their male counterparts, however, they feel they need to work harder to do so. Violence against women in politics also dissuades women from running.

According to a survey conducted on a sample of 3,640 elected municipal officeholders, women face adversities with things such as financing a campaign because they are not as heavily recruited as men by party leaders. There are two factors that contribute to this trend. Firstly, party leaders tend to recruit candidates who are similar to them. Since most party leaders are men, they usually see men as prime candidates because they share more similarities than most women do. The same concept applies when discussing the second factor. Recruitment works through networks such as lower-level office holders or affiliated businesses. Since women are underrepresented in these networks, according to statistics, they are less likely to be recruited than men. Due to these challenges, women have to spend time and conscious effort building a financial support system, unlike men.

Some have argued that politics is a "matrix of domination" designed by race, class, gender, and sexuality. Intersectionality plays a large role in the treatment women face when running for political office and their time serving in a political position. One study in Brazil found racial disparities that fall even heavier on women candidates during candidate recruitment and selection processes. Afro-descendant Brazilian women were the most disadvantaged when running for political office.

Society

Gender inequality within families, inequitable division of labour within households, and cultural attitudes about gender roles further subjugate women and serve to limit their representation in public life. Also, the political underrepresentation of women in post-Soviet democracy which tend to be characterized by high levels of political corruption is often expected to be a results of patriarchal gender norms and voter's preferences for placing men in leadership positions (Moser and Scheiner, 2012). Societies that are highly patriarchal often have local power structures that make it difficult for women to combat. Thus, their interests are often not represented or under-represented.

Voter bias

One major challenge female candidate must overcome to obtain political positions is voter bias. Women were more likely to state that it was easier for men to get elected into higher office. The study found that 58% of men and 73% of women claimed it was easier for men to get elected into higher office. In the US, according to one survey, 15% of Americans still believe men make better political candidates than women. Another survey found that 13% of American women either strongly agree or agree that men tend to make better political candidates than women do.

In the US, many voters assume men and women possess traits that reflect the stereotypes they believe. Many assume women candidates are too emotional, more willing to give-in or compromise, under-qualified, and gentler. These notions often affect women negatively, as people often believe that many women should not be running for office because of these candidate stereotypes (Dolan, 2014).

Systematic challenges

There have been many arguments saying the plurality-majority voting system is a disadvantage to the chance that women get into office. Andrew Reynolds 1997 brings forth one of these arguments by stating: "Plurality-majority single-member-district systems, whether of the Anglo-American first-past-the-post (FPTP) variety, the Australian preference ballot alternative vote (AV), or the French two-round system (TRS), are deemed to be particularly unfavourable to women's chances of being elected to office". Andrew Reynolds believes that the best systems are list-proportional systems. "In these systems of high proportionality between seats won and votes cast, small parties are able to gain representation and parties have the incentive to broaden their overall electoral appeal by making their candidate lists as diverse as possible".

Even once elected, women tend to hold lesser-valued cabinet ministries or similar positions. These are sometimes described as "soft industries" and include health, education, and welfare. Far less often do women hold executive decision-making authority in more powerful domains or those that are associated with traditional notions of masculinity (such as the military). Typically, the more powerful the institution, the less likely it is that women's interests will be represented. Additionally, in more autocratic nations, women are less likely to have their interests represented. Many women attain political standing due to kinship ties, as they have male family members who are involved in politics. These women tend to be from higher income, higher status families and thus may not be as focused on the issues faced by lower-income families. In the United States, the lower end of the professional ladder contains a higher proportion of women while the upper level contains a higher proportion of men. The research according to Smith and Monaghan (2013) shows that women are underrepresented in head positions in state agencies making up only 18% of Congress and 15% of corporate board positions. When women do gain any level of representation it is in the fields of health, welfare, and labour. They are seen to be addressing issues labelled as feminine.

Personal life and choices

Additionally, women running for public office typically gain additional, unnecessary scrutiny on their private lives. For instance, fashion choices of politically active women are often picked apart by the media. In these "analyses" women rarely gain approval from those in the media, who usually say they either show too much skin or too little, or perhaps that they either look too feminine or too masculine. Sylvia Bashevkin,(2009) also notes that their romantic lives are often subject of much interest to the general population, perhaps more than their political agenda or stances on issues. She points out that those who "appear to be sexually active outside a monogamous heterosexual marriage run into particular difficulties, since they tend to be portrayed as vexatious vixens" who are more interested in their private romantic lives than in their public responsibilities. If they are in a monogamous, married relationship but have children, then their fitness for office becomes a question of how they manage being a politician while taking care of their children, something that a male politician would rarely, if ever, be asked about. Family duties and family forming cause significant delays in aspiring women's political careers. A 2017 study found that female Republican candidates fare worse in elections than Republican men and Democratic women (Bucchianeri,2018). A 2020 study found that being promoted to the position of mayor or parliamentarian doubles the probability of divorce for women, but not for men (Folke and Rickne,2020).

Political parties

In Canada, there is evidence that female politicians face gender stigma from male members of the political parties to which they belong which can undermine the ability of women to reach or maintain leadership roles. Pauline Marois, leader of the Parti Québécois (PQ) and the official opposition of the National Assembly of Quebec, was the subject of a claim by Claude Pinard, a PQ "backbencher", that many Quebecers do not support a female politician: "I believe that one of her serious handicaps is the fact she's a woman [...] I sincerely believe that a good segment of the population won't support her because she's a woman"(Banerjee,2011).. A 2000 study that analysed 1993 election results in Canada found that among "similarly situated women and men candidates", women actually had a small vote advantage. The study showed that neither voter turnout nor urban/rural constituencies were factors that help or hurt a female candidate, but "office-holding experience in non-political organizations made a modest contribution to women's electoral advantage" (Black and Erickson,2003).

Bruce M. Hicks, an electoral studies researcher at Université de Montréal, states that evidence shows that female candidates begin with a head start in voters' eyes of as much as 10 percent,

and that female candidates are often more favourably associated with by voters with issues like health care and education. The electorate's perception that female candidates have more proficiency in traditional women's spheres such as education and health care present a possibility that gender stereotypes can work in a female candidate's favour, at least among the electorate. In politics, however, Hicks points out that sexism is nothing new:

(Marois' issue) does reflect what has been going on for some time now: women in positions of authority have problems in terms of the way they manage authority [...] The problem isn't them, it's the men under them who resent taking direction from strong women. And the backroom dirty dialogue can come into the public eye (Banerjee,2011).

Within Quebec itself, Don McPherson pointed out that Pinard himself has enjoyed greater electoral success with Pauline Marois as party leader than under a previous male party leader, when Pinard failed to be elected in his riding. Demographically, Pinard's electoral riding is rural, with "relatively older, less-well educated voters" (McPherson, 2011).

In Nigeria, there are not many women in positions of leadership. Only three of the 109 senators and 14 of the 360 members of the House of Representatives are women at the moment. There are several explanations for why women's political party participation is so low. For instance, women are discouraged from running for office due to the expensive outflow of politics. The requisite nomination and declaration of interest forms that political parties require candidates to submit in order to run for seats on their platform frequently out of the reach of women. Also, the cost of an election campaign is outrageous. And limited access to education also means limited access to jobs that pay well. Women are also less likely to be able to afford to continue the process of obtaining leadership positions due to unpaid labour responsibilities, unequal inheritance rights, open discrimination and societal barriers to women's representation exist.

Societal barriers to women representation in politics

The following are some of the societal barriers to women representation in politics: -

Resource gaps

In one study that looked at campaign funding in Chile, researchers found a significant gender bias against women in campaign funding. In Chile, parties are given money directly from the government to allocate to their various candidates, and candidates are limited to a certain amount of money they can spend on their campaign. The Chilean government instituted multiple policies to try and increase gender representation. They placed a 40% quota on political seats and reimbursed political parties when they chose female political candidates in an effort to incentivize them. Even in this "least-likely" case, researchers found that in candidates with no prior experience running for office, men would out fundraise women.

Intersectionality and challenges faced by women

Many of the challenges women faced that lead to their underrepresentation in political office are amplified through other institutional factors. Race, specifically, plays an increasingly large role in the challenges faced by women when deciding to run for office, actively running for office, and actively holding office. In one study which focused on the treatment of Afro-Brazilian women, researchers found that institutionalizing parties increases the chance that parties will elect women; however, the effect is more muted for Afro-Brazilians. In Brazil, African-Americans already face a significant resource gap like lower average income, lower levels of legislation, and higher illiteracy rates. In conjunction with these barriers, Afro-Brazilian women also face barriers to access to power. Researchers found that Afro-descendant women consistently raised less money and won fewer voters even when they possess the traditional characteristics of an adequate political candidate.

One study found that intersectionality plays a significant role in the ambition of women and their decision to run for political office. They found that when women were told the different reasons for the underrepresentation of women in political office, women of different races responded very differently. Researchers stated that "Attributing women's lack of parity to demand factors allows white and Asian women to "discount" the possibility that failure rests on their own abilities, thus increasing women's political ambition. Alternatively, framing women's underrepresentation as due to supply factors depresses white and Asian women's political ambition possibly because of stereotype threat. Black women respond in an opposite manner, with depressed political ambition in demand scenarios, while Latinas are unaffected by these narratives."

Mirror representation

Women's participation in formal politics is lower than men throughout the world. The argument put forth by scholars Jacquetta Newman and Linda White (2012) is that women's participation in the realm of high politics is crucial if the goal is to affect the quality of public policy. As such, the concept of mirror representation aims to achieve gender parity in public office. In other words, mirror representation says that the proportion of women in leadership should match the proportion of women in the population that they govern. Mirror representation is premised on the assumption that elected officials of a particular gender would likely support policies that seek to benefit constituents of the same gender.

Effects on public policy

A key critique is that mirror representation assumes that all members of a particular sex operate under the rubric of a shared identity, without taking into consideration other factors such as age, education, culture, or socioeconomic status. However, proponents of mirror representation argue that women have a different relationship with government institutions and public policy than that of men, and therefore merit equal representation on this facet alone. This feature is based on the historical reality that women, regardless of background, have largely been excluded from influential legislative and leadership positions. As Sylvia Bashevkin notes, "representative democracy seems impaired, partial, and unjust when women, as a majority of citizens, fail to see themselves reflected in the leadership of their polity." In fact, the issue of participation of women in politics is of such importance that the United Nations has identified gender equality in representation (i.e. mirror representation) as a goal in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action. Besides seeking equality, the goal of mirror representation is also to recognize the significance of women's involvement in politics, which subsequently legitimizes said involvement.

There have been differing results between studies that looked at the significance of women's representation on actual policy outcomes. Though women in the United States are more likely to identify as feminists, a 2014 study looking at the United States finds "no effect of gender of the mayor on policy outcomes." A 2012 study finds mixed evidence that the share of female councillors in Sweden affected conditions for women citizens, such as women's income, unemployment, health, and parental leave. A 2015 study in Sweden said that: "The findings show that female legislators defend feminist interests more than their male colleagues but that they only marginally respond to women's electoral preferences." A 2016 study looking at African politicians finds "gender differences in policy priorities [to be] quite small on average, vary across policy domains and countries".

Social and cultural barriers

Mirror representation stems from the barriers female political candidates often face. These include sex stereotyping, political socialization, lack of preparation for political activity, and balancing work and family. In the media, women are often asked how they would balance the responsibilities of elected office with those to their families, something men are never asked. Religious and socio-cultural factors, the social, political, and economic constraints that these groups must contend with are actively supported by religion, which also works to promote gender stereotypes that are discriminatory against women. For instance, in some northern parts of Nigeria, women are in Purdahs out of reverence for Islam. This suggests that they are segregated in their rooms and that only their spouses have full access to them. The spouse is the only one who must satisfy their requirements. It is best to let rumours about how people are living since the majority of homes are below the poverty line. Religion ensures that a significant majority of women are excluded from economic and political activities, including voting and running for office (Luka, 2011). Islamic edicts are frequently cited as justification for practices like the state's practice of keeping women in "Purdah," giving girls away in early marriages, denying them an education, and limiting their ability to participate effectively in politics in general and when selecting candidates of their choice. The majority of Muslim-populated states in the north observe "purdah," which involves excluding women from the public eye. In purdah, women must always have a male companion with them when they are out in public and are not permitted to leave their homes without their husbands' permission. Further restricting the flexibility of attire for women under purdah is the requirement for Muslim women to cover their faces in public. There is a cultural presumption that women are abominable when they lead men and cannot lead but must be guided. Many women are unable to be found in high-hierarchy positions due to religious and cultural philosophies that work against gender equality and employment prospects for men and women (Abdu, 2002).

Sex stereotyping: Sex stereotyping assumes that masculine and feminine traits are intertwined with leadership. Hence, the bias levelled against women stems from the perception that femininity inherently produces weak leadership. Due to the aggressive and competitive nature of politics, many insist that participation in elected office requires masculine traits. Sex stereotyping is far from being a historical narrative. The pressure is on female candidates (and not male ones) to enhance their masculine traits in order to garner support from voters who identify with socially constructed gender roles. Apart from this, studies by American University in 2011 reveal that women are 60% less likely than men to believe that they are not qualified to take politics responsibility. So, the patriarchy in politics is responsible for less participation of women.

Sexual and physical violence: In Kenya, a woman's rights activist named Asha Ali was threatened and beaten by three men for standing as a candidate in front of her kids and elderly mother. A 2010 survey of eight hundred likely U.S voters found that even very mild sexist language had an impact on their likelihood of voting for a woman (Krook, 2017). Even in early 2016, a 14-year-old girl was kidnapped from her bed late at night and raped as revenge for her mother's victory in local elections in India, which is an example of sexual violence. Political violence is another element that lowers women's political participation in Nigeria. Due to the involvement of thugs before, during, and after elections (Kolawale et al., 2012) and the ensuing insecurity, which involves the loss of lives and property, politics is generally out of the question for women. A female political candidate, Dorathy Nyone, described her own experience by saying, "A ward chairman was shot dead; all the women and most of the males fled the scene." My partner picked me up and drove me home. I was afraid since, to determine the winners by hand, only men who were well equipped for the bloodshed remained behind (Luka, 2011).

Even though this tale typically represents electoral violence in Nigeria, many women now fear politics due to the recent spate of political murders, ongoing political intimidation, and other violent acts. All of this evidence suggests that women face many challenges in a political environment where men try to suppress women whenever they try to raise their voices in politics for making positive change for women's empowerment.

Lack of media support: The qualitative and quantitative study reveals that media reflects and strengthens a male-overwhelmed society. Women in the news is usually for bad news and just for all the vulgar or wrong reasons such as about their looks, personal life and their clothes and characters. Media likes to give more updates about all these above examples instead of their actual politics role and achievements

Political socialization: Political socialization is the idea that, during childhood, people are indoctrinated into socially constructed norms of politics. In the case of women's representation in government, it says that sex stereotyping begins at an early age and affects the public's disposition on which genders are fit for public office. Socialization agents can include family, school, higher education, mass media, and religion. Each of these agents plays a pivotal role in either fostering a desire to enter politics, or dissuading one to do so.

Generally, girls tend to see politics as a "male domain". Newman and White suggest that women who run for political office have been "socialized toward an interest in and life in politics" and that "many female politicians report being born into political families with weak gender-role norms".

Women running for U.S senate are often underrepresented in news coverage. The way male and female candidates are depicted in media has an effect on how female candidates gets elected in to public office. Female candidates get treated differently in the media than their male counterparts in the U.S senate elections. Women receive less news coverage and the coverage they do receive concentrates more on their viability and less on their issue positions, which causes female candidates to be overlooked and underrated during elections, which is an obstacle for women running for U.S senate.

Lack of preparation for political activity: An aftereffect of political socialization is that it determines how inclined women are to pursue careers that may be compatible with formal politics. Careers in law, business, education, and government, professions in which women happen to be minorities, are common occupations for those that later decide to enter public office.

Discriminatory customs and laws

The customs of many modern countries are discriminatory because they devalue women and treat them as men's property. Women feel generally inferior to men and are at a disadvantage in the socio-political environment, even in urban regions, as a result of gender stereotyping cultural norms, and behaviours. Because of these socially constructed standards and stereotype roles, women overemphasize their "femininity" because they accept their status as "weaker sexes," overemphasize the sensitive element of their sex and equate high performance with men. For instance, most traditions place more value on sending the boy to a school than they do on the girl, who is expected to care for the siblings and find a husband. This makes it more difficult for women to compete with men in politics because there are a few more illiterate women than there used to be. (Agbalajobi, 2010).

Balancing work and family: The work life balance is invariably more difficult for women, because they are generally expected by society to act as the primary caregivers for children and maintainers of the home. Due to these demands, it is assumed that women would choose to delay political aspirations until their children are older. Also, a woman's desire for a career in

politics along with the extent that the respondent feels her family duties might inhibit her ability to be an elected official. Research has shown that new female politicians in Canada and the U.S. are older than their male counterparts. Conversely, a woman may be pushed to remain childless in order to seek political office.

Institutional barriers may also pose as a hindrance for balancing a political career and family. For instance, in Canada, Members of Parliament do not contribute to Employment Insurance; therefore, they are not entitled to paternity benefits. Such lack of parental leave would undoubtedly be a reason for women to delay seeking electoral office. Furthermore, mobility plays a crucial role in the work-family dynamic. Elected officials are usually required to commute long distances to and from their respective capital cities, which can be a deterrent for women seeking political office.

Amelioration of women involvement and participation in Nigerian politics

There was no gender parity on problems of leadership in the public and private sectors of the economy during the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras. There have always been problems with male domination in Nigerian leadership, and the lack of female involvement in public affairs hurts the expansion of organizations. The Beijing conference in 1995, also known as the fourth international conference on women, which emphasized equal participation of women in decision-making bodies, marked the beginning of the golden age of women. It also implied that difficulties facing society should be balanced between men and women. The main metrics for measuring effective leadership - participatory leadership, accountability, and transparency - call for gender parity in leadership opportunities (Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2015). To ensure that women have the chance to engage in leadership, Nigeria has ratified a variety of international, regional, and national legislation; yet, these laws are only put into practice on paper. Despite the 30% and 35% affirmative action offered to women in the National Gender Policy (2006) and the National Women Policy (2000), respectively, Nigeria has not been able to show its commitment by electing women to leadership posts. The high level of poverty among women is a result of their lack of access to resources like microcredit programs, capital for large-scale investment, and land for agricultural pursuits. This can be lessened, though, by providing equitable access to resources, advancing technology, empowering women in their entrepreneurship, enlightening women about investment prospects, and assisting women in the development of small, medium, and large-scale businesses. Campaigns have been undertaken to register women and girls in elementary, post-primary, and tertiary institutions. The percentage of women and girls enrolled in school varies by geopolitical zone, according to the 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (64% in the North East, 69% in the North West, and 5% in the South-South and South East). According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2016), this is supported by the fact that 48.8% of girls enrolled in primary school and 45.7% in secondary school, and that the completion rates for these two levels of education are 48.3% and 47.9%, respectively. Additionally, 43.7% of girls attended tertiary institutions, with a 38.4% completion rate (Udom et al., 2022). Taking leadership positions in private and public organizations becomes challenging when women and girls are not given equal opportunities and access to education. Changing the perception of most Nigerian parents, especially those in rural areas, on the role of women in society will help in achieving this (Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although women may function at the greatest levels in both the public and private realms, a vicious loop of barriers frequently hinders their ability to lead. The success of these individuals as leaders has been significantly hampered by both internal and external obstacles, including societal and cultural prejudices, patriarchy, the challenge of juggling parental and professional commitments, and a lack of networking. To conclude this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. It takes more than just a shift in mindsets to eliminate harmful sociocultural stereotypes, patriarchy, religiosity, and gender bias against women's participation in government. To gain the necessary leadership qualities, women should choose to pursue positions of leadership in both the public and private sectors and should educate themselves to the highest levels. To reduce illiteracy and prepare female students for future leadership duties, parents, especially those in rural areas, should be urged to enrol their female children in school.
- ii. It is not advised for a woman leader to strive to be more masculine to succeed, nor should she let her more "feminine" traits get in the way of getting things done. Therefore, female leaders should maintain concentration on their departments' and organizations' objectives. To overcome self-doubt, it's crucial to urge people to disregard the inner voice that may keep them from making difficult decisions, speaking up, or venturing outside of their comfort zone.
- iii. The numerous rules and pieces of legislation that are in place to empower women in various facets of leadership positions have fallen short in addressing sociocultural stereotypes about women in leadership, hence limiting their access to and success in such opportunities. The study, therefore, suggests that the current women empowerment policy be reviewed to reflect the actual situation and that government should also establish a network of women leaders so that women can share their leadership successes and challenges to inspire other women who aspire to be leaders.

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