

# Nigeria Women in Politics: Challenges and Way Forward

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**Abstract:** Gender as a concept has attracted interest globally across different endeavours especially women participation in politics. This is because politics is a major pillar that upholds any society as an act of governance. The paper focus on several issues that border on gender disparity in Nigeria's political process. It was discovered that some factors were responsible for low participation of Nigerian women in politics. The study recommended that to attain these goals, there is need for both men and women to be adequately part of decision making at all levels of government. This will guaranteed the representation of gender issues as they affect both sexes.

This paper is basically on the role of women in the Nigerian politics. The inferiority complex of women regarding active political participation and representation constitute the bane of this study. The most critical element of this discourse is however that women are, and have been sidelined in the political scheme of things in Nigeria and this state of affairs spells a dangerous omen for the Nigerian system which is now literally dominated and controlled by men. In the past, experience has shown, of course as demonstrated in the study, that women's political roles have contributed immensely in the shaping of the Nigerian politics. It will be unthinkable to wish away the critical efforts of women in the making of Nigerian state while arrogating political powers to the male folk. It is also unhealthy to ascribe political powers strictly to men in this era of globalization where the role of women in global politics is considered to be relevant in overall world peace, tranquillity and mutual co-existence.

**Keywords:** Women and Politics.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Nigerian women have encountered a number of problems while venturing into politics. This is as a result of large scale marginalization both in voting exercises and in allocation of political offices. Political violence and the social stigma that politics is a dirty game is a further stumbling block for women to become actively involved in the politics of this country. These are the major causes for the low representation of women in Nigeria's politics.

More often than not, men constitute a larger percentage of the party membership and this tends to affect women when it comes to selecting or electing candidates for positions. Since men are usually in the majority in the political party setup, they tend to dominate the party hierarchy and are therefore, at advantage in influencing the party's internal politics.

Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigerian women have tried to gain access to political decision making positions by contesting for elective positions at various levels. Their efforts however have not translated to appreciative gains as subsequent elections since (Maryam, 2016)

Women usually constitute a smaller percentage of political party membership because of the social, cultural and religious demand of different Nigerian societies that most often tend to relegate women to the background. Another problem facing women is lack of adequate education. Women constitute a larger percentage of the illiterate group in Nigeria. This could be attributed to the fact that in most families, parents prefer to send their sons to school, instead of their daughters whom they feel will eventually get married and get incorporated into another family. Thus, a larger percentage of the girls remain uneducated and unexposed.

Lack of adequate finance is a crucial hindrance to effective female participation in politics in Nigeria. A large portion of the Nigerian female population is not as financially strong as their male counterparts. Education as a major issue in human endeavour cost a lot and when the financial provisions are not met, the educational aspirations and visions are cut short abruptly. Pointer, (2016)

Over the years women have been relegated to the background in issues of the overall development especially in the developing nations like Nigeria. This is borne out of the sentimental attachment on feminine gender. Historical evidences are available to prove that the Nigerian women have for long been playing crucial role in political life of the country, and this has contributed in no small measure in shaping the political system of the nation. For development of any kind to be successful, a vantage position should be accorded the women, as they constitute larger proportion of the population. In this regard, they should not be left out in the issues of decision making that bothers even on their lives as a people.

There is no doubt that women have some potentials and rights to contribute meaningfully to the development of their country. Therefore, the Nigerian government should work towards achieving gender equality in democratic governance, increase women participation and access to politics. It must be realized that the role of women as home makers cannot be down played in that it equally has an extended impact on their responsibility in service, the women touch anywhere cannot be matched Rita (2010).

Peter Mac Manu, (2015) also spoke and noted that “women’s political leadership and governance was critical to societal and human development and that the systemic entrenchment of practices aimed at the continued marginalization of women in the political process must stop.” This gender bias in Nigeria’s political system is often traced to the onset of colonialism in Nigeria. Thus the western cultural notion of colonialism woven around male superiority reflected in their relations with Nigerians.

Generally speaking, and from contemporary perspectives in Nigeria, it would appear that women had never been influential in the realm of Nigerian politics. In the past, and even in the present democratic dispensation, there has been and there is still some fair share of recognition of the increasing role of women in the Nigerian society, be they social, economic or political. (Erunke, 2009)

## 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

An emerging contemporary challenges been faced by Nigerians women today is the inadequacy of Nigeria women in politics (elective positions and other political appointment) all over the country which is against the international standard of atleast 35% women in political offices.

Several reasons have been the cause of these challenges. These include gender inequality, high rate of poverty and illiteracy among Nigerian women due to some religious and cultural beliefs.

Oluremi Tinubu also observed that Men have always been a very dominant character, the women find it difficult to know where they are placed, men expect women to even beg for their own right, and that the country has a very long way to go. (Adams, 2016)

At the heat of these challenges is the Absence of a Comprehensive strategy for promoting women in politics, promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls educationally and economically as an approach to addressing the challenges of Nigeria women in politics.

It is against this background that this study seeks to find answer to the following research questions:

### *Research Questions*

- 1) What are the challenges been faced by Nigeria women in politics?
- 2) What are the factors responsible for the challenges of Nigeria women in politics?
- 3) What are the strategies for promoting Nigeria women involvement in politics?

### *Objectives of the Study*

The main objective of this study is to examine the challenges of Nigeria omen in politics and the way forward and the specific objectives are:

- 1) To identify the challenges of Nigeria women in politics;
- 2) To determine the factors responsible for the challenges of Nigeria women in politics and;
- 4) To proffer comprehensive strategies that can be used to promote Nigeria women in politics.

### ***Scope of the study***

The essence of this research work is to primarily study the Challenges of Nigeria Women in Politics and the way forward to promoting Nigeria women in politics. The research intends to focus on all the 36 states representing the 6 geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

## **3. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

For the purpose of clarity, the concepts of politics, Women participation and power will be used interchangeably in the discourse

### ***Politics***

Etzioni (1970) opined that politics stands for the competition (and in most cases such competitions could be fierce and unhealthy) for the control of the public policy making process within the organized framework of government.

Okuosa (1996), further argued that in a democratic society, power acquisition and control is achieved privately or collectively, irrespective of gender through a process of active participation and representation, which then means that the question of gender discrimination is ruled out in terms of contestation or even nomination of persons or groups into political offices.

### ***Women Participation***

There cannot be political power without women participation and adequate gender representation and by extension, political participation connotes a variety of ways in which people try to (and of course are supposed to) exercise influence over the political process, the kind of political process which has the potential of attracting best brains cutting across all gender, whether male or female Thus when this is the case, for sure, there will be the likelihood of equity in the level of participation and representation of the opposite sex in the scheme of things, thereby clearly and conspicuously integrating diverse human potentials in the political arrangement in the society (Omodia et al., 2012)

In terms of women in politics, particularly, in Nigeria, there are few occasions you would witness women participating in any political activity, especially during elections, few contest for political positions and very few women vote. Some factors that hinder women participation are further discussed below.

### ***Political Power***

By the concept of power, it means the capacity to overcome part or all the resistance to introduce changes in the face of opposition and this includes sustaining a course of action or preserving a status quo that would otherwise have been discontinued. The concept of political power or powerlessness is applicable when the capacity to overcome resistance is related to the control of public policy. Consequently, the political power that women or any group of persons in a society have would be linked directly to a degree of their participation in the political process of that society Maclosky (1968)

### ***Women***

Refers to the female gender, the opposite of male gender. There is the dependency syndrome that women are known to have being dependent on men. In order words, their roles are that of helpers to men Adams, (2016)

According to Agbalajobi (2010) and Kira (2003), the increasing domination of women by men have several theoretical underpinnings and are varied. On the one hand, women are less represented in politics due to persistent cultural stereotype, abuse of religious and traditional practices. On the other hand, the relegation of women from the realm of politics is akin to the kind of societal social structures in operation at a particular point in time.

For the most part, they adopted the prevailing view that the proper role of women was marriage, procreation and family, not politics... they never recommended that women be allowed to vote and considered it more or less self-evident that in family matters, the husbands have the final say. Men are generally heavier, taller and even physically stronger than

women and therefore more capable than women to enforce their will through physical violence and threat of violence. Women on the other hand are vulnerable because of their role of child bearing and nursing. In addition, discrimination and subjugation of women is further enforced by custom, traditional practices, beliefs and the law, behind which stood coercive force of the state Anifowose (2004).

#### 4. SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The following findings were made:

- (i) Religious beliefs, cultural beliefs and Lack of Effective means of implementation are the major challenges faced by Nigeria women in politics.
- (ii) The major strategy to promote women involvement in politics is to create awareness of everyone to the benefit that can drive national development through women involvement in politics.
- (iii) The major ways to promote women involvement in politics is the economic and educational empowerment of women and girls in Nigeria, empowerment through poverty alleviation programmes and also to create awareness of everyone to the benefit that can drive national development through women playing active role in politics.
- (iv) Women are more in civil service jobs like Nurses, Teachers, Secretaries and less in the political sector.
- (v) From the analysis of the study southern women are the major set of women involve in active politics in Nigeria.

#### 5. NIGERIAN WOMEN IN VARIOUS SECTORS

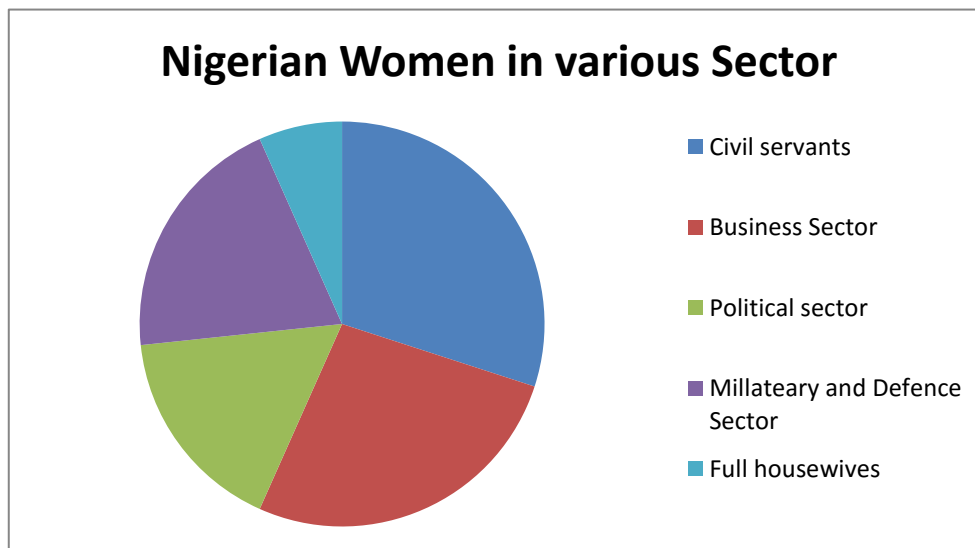
Civil Servants 45%

Business Sector 40%

Political sectors 25%

Military 30%

Full house wives 10%



Source, Adams, 2016

Figure 1: Graphical notation of Nigeria women in various sectors

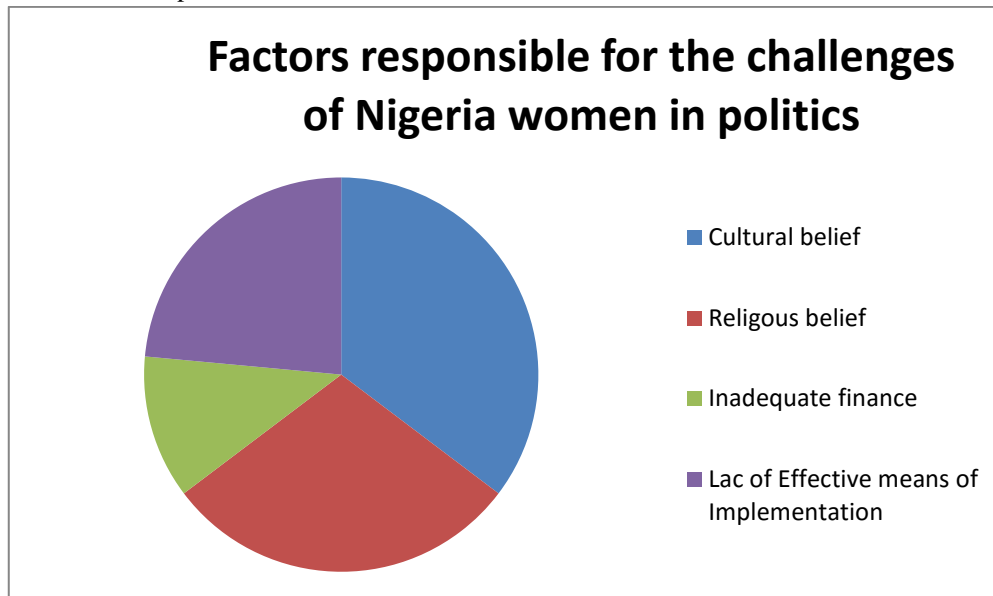
#### Factors responsible for the challenges of Nigeria women in politics

Cultural belief 60%

Religious belief 50%

Inadequate Finances 20%

Lack of Effective means of implementation 50%



Source: Field Survey, 2016

**Figure 2: Graphical notation Factors responsible for the challenges of Nigeria women in politics**

#### *Strategies that can be used to promote Nigeria women in politics*

For the purpose of this research some strategies were derived from the result of the analysis of the study. These include:

- Educational Empowerment of Women
- Economic Empowerment of Women
- More Political Appointment for Women
- Awareness should be made to everyone on the benefit of gender equality as it relates to National Security in Nigeria.
- Women should be more confident, know their right, and believe there is nothing they can't achieve.
- Men should start accepting the fact that both genders are equal and should be given same treatment everywhere at all time.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the challenges of Nigeria women in politics. Some issues that are central to women and politics include high rate of poverty and illiteracy, culture and religious belief, Lack of Effective means of implementation. All these constitute major challenges of Nigeria women in politics.

It is quite glaring that gender equality implies equal rights, opportunities, and treatment for women and men, girls and boys in all spheres of life. It equally implies that both men and women are free to develop their personal abilities most especially in politics and make choices without the limitations. If women are well empowered and have proper orientation about life and what it takes to become whatever they want to be irrespective of their gender, religion and culture, then it will be easier for them to contest for some elective positions and also encourage the government appoint them in a political thereby increasing the number of women in politics.

Nigeria is therefore called upon to be part of global trend towards gender equality although significant strides have been made in many countries of the world to bridge gender gaps, and advance gender equality, in compliance with the demands of international instruments on women's right, most countries like Nigeria are still lagging behind especially in strategic positions. Awe (1995) for example Women in the upper chamber of the National Assembly is 7 out of 109 Senators and 14 in the Green Chamber of 360 Legislature, altogether which is equivalent to 4.4% of the whole National Assembly. So also the Federal Executive Council has 3 Women out of 36 Ministers which is just 8.3%.

Finally, the above discourse has succinctly shown that Nigerian women are unevenly treated and it has also been said that for women to be duly represented in decision making body, they must be heavily empowered. The implication of this is that for an even political structure to be in place, men and women can compete with one another equally, there is the need for a political collective behaviour revolution that surpasses the 35% affirmative plan. (Iloh and Ikenna, 2009)

I have been able to demonstrate in this work that Nigerian women still have a long way to go in attaining the pinnacle of political decision making. Given their poor performance in electoral politics since the country's return to democratic rule, it is apparent that women struggle to get relevant in political leadership continued to be hindered by certain factors. Maryam, (2016)

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

There should be equality in the sharing of political offices on the basis of quota system between competing candidates. This will enable both men and women have equal chances of control in such public offices.

The federal should make it mandatory that certain public offices be allotted to women on equal basis. This will dissolve any form of discrimination of women by men.

Money politics should be discouraged in Nigeria while women who want to take active part in politics be encouraged to do so without any fear or favour.

Uprooting of all obnoxious traditional practices that impede the rights of women: The Nigerian government should collaborate with traditional rulers in Nigeria and other stakeholders to ensure that all harmful and traditional practices which target only women, are uprooted.

Economic Empowerment of Women: It is high time Nigerian government increased women's presence at the labour market by granting women more loan to start up businesses to reduce poverty and boost their confidence and hope of attaining high positions in Nigeria.

More Educational Empowerment of Women; Compulsory girl-child education which Nigeria has already adopted should be enforced and sustained.

More Political Appointment for Women: Nigerian government is called upon to beef up her political appointive positions for women. The present appointments still fall short of the international expectation, that 35 per cent of all political appointment should be reserved for women.

Enactment of Female Based Specific Law: It is apparent from this discourse that there is every need to enact gender specific laws to curb gender violence.

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