



# **An Empirical Analysis of Women's Participation in Nigerian Politics from 1963 to 2022**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Most of the population in Nigeria today are women. There is no doubt that their participation in politics can bring about political and socio-economic development. Yet, women are sidelined and, most of the time, relegated to the background in terms of politics despite the affirmative action of 35% of women. Therefore, this study critically reviews Nigerian women's participation in politics based on the affirmative declaration using empirical studies done concerning the issue at hand. The intersectional theory serves as the study's theoretical foundation. Based on empirical research from previous studies, it was revealed that for Nigeria to achieve democratic consolidation, women must aim for prominence in mainstream political growth. So, it was suggested that steps be taken to fix the low number of women in Nigerian politics, which will not make much of a difference until the country's socio-economic, cultural, and political factors that keep women from being powerful are fixed.

*Keywords: Equity; equality; key power positions; women; affirmative action; politics; participation.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Homemakers are the backbone of the average family in Africa, especially in Nigeria [1]. Women

are the custodians of social, cultural, and fundamental values in societies [2]. Women's participation and contributions toward the political and socio-economical development of a

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democratic state are immeasurable [3]. Some Nigerian women, such as Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Folorunsho Alakija, among others, have exhibited and demonstrated competence in the management of public affairs and leadership positions [4,5] (Ebgo, 2021). Fasugba [6] notes that women have continued to engage in activities that are traditionally regarded as male-exclusive events. Women, having become conscious of fundamental rights, have continued to hassle it out in areas of humanitarian endeavours [7].

Working with global standards, both genders have been endorsed with equal fundamental rights and opportunities to participate fully in all political processes at all levels. There is no doubt that a great percentage of the world's population are women who contribute vitally to societal development and progress generally [8]. Globally, women play important roles such as mothers, producers, home managers, and community organizers as well as socio-cultural and political activists [9]. Of the many roles mentioned, the last has been engendered by the women's movement [9].

In line with global trends, Nigerian women account for nearly half of the country's population. However, despite this significant population, women's roles in society have yet to reach their full potential and receive the necessary recognition [10]. Nigeria obtained independence from Britain in 1960. By October 1, 2022, the country will celebrate its 61st anniversary. Sixty-one years later, women's participation in politics and decision-making remains abysmally low. No woman has ever been president or vice president, which are the top two positions in the country, except for Virginia Ngozi Etiba (2006–2009), who was governor of Anambra before she was impeached, and Hadiza Sabuwa Balarabe (2019–to date), who is the deputy governor. Fifty-one years after independence and the establishment of republican rule, only seven female deputy governors have been identified, in the 2007–2011 Cabinet, women made up 20% of the Federal Executive Council, the largest percentage ever [11].

The Senate had the highest percentage of women in any position, with nine out of one hundred nine members, at 8.3 percent (Statisticalcs, 2015). Meanwhile, only twenty-seven women, or 7.5 percent, are represented in the House of Representatives, which has 360

members (Statisticalcs, 2015). Over the past few years, about 51% of Nigeria's women have been involved in the election process, including voting [11]. Women can be said to be under-represented in elective and appointive positions inclusively. Statistics and previous studies have shown that less than 7% of Nigeria's government officials are women [12]. The implication is that Nigeria has yet to attain the 30 per cent affirmative quota which was stipulated in the Beijing Platform of Action. Although women make up about half of Nigeria's current population forecast of more than 140 million people, based on the 2006 census, women are underrepresented in politics and decision-making [13]. While the global average for women in Parliament is 19.2%, which is the same as in Sub-Saharan Africa, women's representation in Nigeria is at an all-time low of 7% at the national level and 5.5 percent at the state level [14].

Subsequently, Nigeria's low female involvement in elective and appointive roles has become a nemesis and a source of worry for many Nigerians, as it appears that modern women are not considered worthy of rule [15]. However, it can be said that efforts by government and non-governmental organisations have been made to increase the significant participation level of women in Nigerian politics, which agrees with the fourth World Conference on Beijing declaration with regard to women in power, advocating 30% dogmatic action [16]. However, the National Gender Policy (NGP) did recommend 35% affirmative action, aiming for women to hold at least 35% of elective and appointive public service positions in the country [17].

With the upcoming 2023 general elections warming up in the country, there can be said to be female aspirants cutting across various political parties, both the big and small names. For instance, we have female aspirants such as Khadijah Okunnu-Lamidi of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), Uju Ohanenye, the first female presidential aspirant under the current ruling party, All Progressive Congress (APC), Carlo Nwosu of Africa Action Congress (AFFC), Ibainabo Joy Dokubo of Action Progress Congress (APC), Patience Key of the People's Redemption Party (PRP), Olivia Diana Teriela of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and last but not least, Angela Johnson of All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) [18]. From the foregoing, the turnout of women in politics warming up for the 2023 general election is abysmally low. Most of these aspirants have not yet gotten

presidential tickets from their respective parties, and from all indications, some of these women who have indicated interest in elective positions may not even make it past the parties' primaries. No doubt, women can be as competent as their male counterparts in key leadership positions, but the big question is: can they be given the chance to occupy prominent positions such as the presidency or governorship in Nigeria, or are they going to be sidelined once again and only good as the first ladies and wives of key political office holders?

## 2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Going through many studies with regards to women in power in Nigeria, Africa and even in the global hemisphere, it is quite disheartening, to say the least, that women in power are growing less significant as the days go by. Aside from the monarch system of government in the British Empire, where Queen Elizabeth passes on power, it is hard to say that women have been elected easily and at the same time to the positions of president and vice president in different democratic countries.

So far, from 1963 to 2022, women have not occupied the positions of president, vice president, or been appointed as Senate president. Why is that so? Could it be a societal mentality that women can not occupy those positions? Are there no worthy female aspirants across Nigeria? Is the electoral process given a gender-equal playing ground? Are these political parties misogynist? This and many more questions intrigue the need to historically and empirically unveil the obstacles facing female political aspirants and possibly solutions that may help in fixing the ideological mishappening that is crippling the growth of women in politics, particularly in Nigeria.

## 3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This paper aims to empirically review how women have fared in the Nigerian politics despite the 35% affirmative action and despite socio-religious and economic limitations confronting them.

## 4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical race theory, gender conflict theory, and critical components of Marx's class theory are all combined in intersectional theory. It is a "prism for understanding specific kinds of difficulties,"

according to Kimberlé Crenshaw. For example, a woman who exhibits certain behaviours that are generally regarded as appropriate for leadership (e.g., strong, opinionated, concise) may be viewed as "bossy" or "difficult to work with," whereas a man exhibiting the same behaviours would be viewed as someone ready for a leadership position. At the micro-sociological level, this form of meaning-making that is imbued with gender role norm socialisation leads to wage disparity. This theory is relevant to the study because it addresses a point of contention addressed in the study: women are perceived as insubordinate or unfit for certain positions of power, and when such barriers are attempted to be broken and hurdles overcome by women, they are relegated to their ultimate "homemaker role." This begs the question: if a woman can successfully handle her household and follow her work, why can't she do the same for a country?

## 5. METHODOLOGY

This paper used the library research method. This method involves identifying and locating significant secondary data, and analysing it in line with the subject matter under investigation and then developing and expressing one's idea. It is a good source of secondary data collection where research by other scholars can be accessed, analysed and evaluated. Secondary sources make information easily accessible. This approach allows for easy use of secondary data that can be accessed from journals, books, newspapers, magazines, the internet etc. and then used for discussing the subject matter at stake by the researcher from which a conclusion is usually drawn [19,20].

## 6. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

### 6.1 Women in Political Race: From 1963 to 2022

Women's political participation has taken a favourable turn, yet there is still minimal participation of women in Nigeria's polity [7]. Women's participation in post-independence era politics was damaging as ethnicity, paternalism, and personality-oriented politics became the order of the day for both politics and parties. The support of politicians was basically on ethnic ground, with no consideration whatsoever for women's agendas and interests [21]. Women's collective action power was lost in Nigerian politics, which was a crucial point in the colonial

era agitations; gender solidarity was replaced by party and ethnic allegiance [7].

From 1960 to 1965, there were only two women in the Senate, which is part of the federal parliament, and three in the Eastern House of Assembly [22]. Four female legislators in the whole of the country were provided the necessary platform to influence decision-making to favour the female gender. The military imposition era, which began in 1966, did not encourage women's political engagement, and there was little or no mention of women in positions of power. Military authority can be described as an alpha male rule, and women were only allowed to play minor roles throughout that time [12].

In 1967, with the division of Nigeria into 12 states, one female appointee was nominated each as East Central and Lagos commissioners, and two female commissioners were held in Oyo state [23]. In 1975, Obasanjo's Constituent Assembly had no female delegates among its 50 members, which occurred during a military era with little or no consideration for constitutional interest balance, disrupting the operation of women's organisations as pressure groups as these outposts were forbidden. Women were not prominently recognised during the transition of power to civilians. Mrs. Janet Akinrinade was elected to the Constituent Assembly during the Murtala/Obasanjo regime, even though no woman was appointed to the fifty-member Constitutional Drafting Committee. Few women were elected to local government councils in the 1976 elections, and no woman was appointed to the fifty-member Constitutional Drafting Committee. Among the 250 members of the assembly, four were chosen.

Despite increasing attempts to give women opportunities to contribute to national progress, there were no significant differences in women's political engagement in the Second Republic [24]. Women made excellent steps toward becoming a part of representative politics in 1979, but there were stumbling blocks, with low representation in the Senate, the House of Representatives, and the States House of Assembly. Women made up about three ministers and one senator out of 96 members of the Senate and 11 of 450 members of the House of Representatives [13]. There was no female representation in any of the 19 state legislatures, and at the local government level, there was no female chairman or councilor [22]. Second republic's fall, women again faded out of

relevance in Gen. Mohammed Buhari's two-year regime [12]. The military's appointment of women to leadership roles was modest but evident in the mid-1980s, and as a result, in 1985, Gen Ibrahim Babangida reversed the military rulers' stance toward women's leadership. The phenomenon of personal First Lady Syndrome played an important role in the prominence of women in politics [17]. Better Life for Rural Women was established under this aegis and was later renamed the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) by the succeeding First Lady.

Women's minimal engagement in the Nigerian political process began with the Fourth Republic in 1999, with only 181 posts won by women out of 11, 881 positions available across the country in the general elections [25]. Only five (4.6%) women were elected to the Senate out of 109 senators, while 13 (3.6%) women were elected to the House of Representatives out of 360 members, giving women a 6.3 percent participation in the national legislature [26]. No women were running for any of the 36 governorships. Chief Kofoworola Akerele-Bucknor, deputy governor of Lagos State (1999–2003), was the only female deputy governor, and 12 (1.21 percent) of the 990 seats in the State House of Assembly were filled by women [27]. At the local level, 9 of the 774 local government chairpersons were women, while 143 of the 8,700 councillors were women [24].

The International Human Rights Law Group, the Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA), and Gender and Development Action (GADA) held a national summit for women politicians in Abuja on June 28, 2002. This was mainly in response to women's poor election results, and the main goal was to get more women involved in Nigerian politics [25]. Despite efforts to increase women's political involvement, there was no notable improvement in the 2003 elections. In the 2003 elections, 21 (6.1 per cent) of the 339 House of Representatives seats were won by women. Additionally, just 3 (2.7%) of the 109 senatorial seats were filled by women, resulting in 8.8% female representation in the national legislature (UNDP Report, 2003; [21]. In the 36 gubernatorial seats available, no woman was elected, and 38 (3.84 per cent) of the 990 seats in the States House of Assembly were elected by women [27]. In 2007, women were elected to 25 (6.9%) of the 358 seats in the House of Representatives and 9 (8.3%) of the 109 Senate seats. This equates to 7.3 percent female representation in the national legislature.

At the state level, 36 gubernatorial seats were available; none were elected, and 54 (5.5 per cent) of the 990 seats in the States House of Assembly were elected [28].

According to data from the Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC), 7160 candidates ran in the April 2007 elections, with 628 women accounting for 8.8% of the total number of candidates. About 209 or 6.7 percent of the 3141 candidates for the seats in the National Assembly (799 candidates for the Senate and 2342 candidates for the House of Representatives) were women (59 or 7.4 per cent for the Senate and 150 or 6.4 per cent for the House of Representatives) [28], indicating a 2%, 4%, and 6% representation in 1999, 2003, and 2007.

However, this reflects an improvement in women's representation in politics, which agrees with the general trend. This was due to the Obasanjo administration's affirmative efforts to incorporate women into the political administration, which resulted in the payment of pre-registration levies for political hopefuls by political parties being waived for women. Additionally, the International Human Rights Law Group, the Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA), and Gender and Development Action (GADA) held a national summit for women politicians in 2002 to increase women's active participation in Nigerian politics. Other gender-related organisations and NGOs, as well as other gender-related organisations and NGOs, encouraged women to run for political office in the general elections of 2003 and 2007 [25].

In Nigeria's history, no female state governors have been elected, with six serving as deputy governors (Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Imo, Plateau, and the Anambra States), casting doubt on the premise that democracy would increase women's political engagement [21,27,28].

## 6.2 Empirical Study

Women in politics have, from back in the day, encountered numerous issues that have handicapped their revolution and success. Some term the demand for equality and equity as feminism, holding tenaciously that a woman's place is in her home [29]. In modern times, from the 1900s till date, a woman's role has transcended beyond the homemaker to that of a home builder, who must stand as an alternative support to the man of the house. If a woman can

balance home and career, why does the idea of balancing home and nation-building seem absurd to the public? In the Igbo language, a woman is fondly known as Ori-Akudiya, which means "one who enjoys her husband's wealth," but the way the economy and society are going, it has been changed to "OduziAkudiya," which also means "one who manages her husband's wealth." Many challenges hinder women's representation and actual success in the world of politics. Nigeria, to be precise, has not had any female politician from 1963 to date who has occupied the positions of president, vice president, senate president, or even governor of any of the 36 states that are duly elected [30].

Many scholars have suggested that the liberalisation of women in politics was a global phenomenon, highlighting various challenges that have hampered the successful exposure of females to the world of politics over the years [31]. This forms the basis of the study, which empirically reviewed these findings, highlighting errors and proposing feasible solutions to the issue of women in politics and gender equality.

Oluyemi [32] while outlining issues handicapping women in politics, mentioned patriarchy as one of the major issues facing women in politics. Oluyemi thought that Nigeria was a male-dominated society, which led to the idea that women were just homemakers and didn't have a say in households or political decisions. Because of this, Oluyemi thought that women's contributions were worthless. Additionally, according to Sogbesan [11], there was no female governor among all aspirants in the 36 states of Nigeria, and society did not look ready to accept a woman as president, even though a woman stood for the job in 2015. Given the foregoing, Ojo [21] argued that women must rise and fight for inclusion in a freer society where equality and equity are extremely important in the political, social, cultural, and religious spheres of society, with the desire that women understand their rights as Nigerian citizens and should not be disrespected by societal standards.

Politics in this nation has always been referred to as a "dirty game" and as such, desperate politicians will do anything to get power. Jumbo et al. [19] note that a political environment engulfed with so much negativity can hardly attract people with genuine political interests who have a strong desire to advance the socio-economic and political sectors of the country. Oluyemi [32], termed this challenge in a study as

stigmatisation, was of the view that with the way Nigeria's politics is played, it is being perceived that it is for individuals who have no regard for human rights and or those who compromise virtue for indecent gains. This has become a norm in the politics of Nigeria and, as such, women aspirants are viewed as promiscuous. Furthermore, Eme et al. [33] said in their study that the structure of Nigerian politics discourages women's engagement because meetings are frequently held late at night on an ad hoc basis, exposing attendees to potential or personal hazards. Women who attend such gatherings are sometimes labelled as possessing easy virtues. Generally, Nigerian politics is regarded as "hazardous," and female politicians are generally regarded as having questionable moral character due to their desires and ambitions [33]. Women's stigmatisation by other women inhibits them from participating in politics; in many cases, the lack of true and decisive affirmative action to encourage women to participate in politics leaves a legacy that limit women's political participation as candidates and voters [34].

Religion in Nigeria inclusion in Christianity and Islam does not disseminate much role for women in public life, which is also attainable in cultural values, where women's culturally defined roles are submissiveness and an image of virtue [35]. This is a barrier to women's political participation. Cultural conventions and traditional beliefs influence women's political participation considerably [36]. After defining culture, consider how cultural ideological elements influence women's political engagement [35]. As a result, findings from previous studies show that gender roles ideology creates not only a duality of femininity and masculinity but also a hierarchical structure in which women are subordinated to men, making it difficult for women to participate in politics due to the limited time available due to productive and reproductive dual roles [35]. However, Alexander and Welzel [37]; Inglehart and Norris [38] note an increase in emancipative orientations, which leads to increased women's empowerment and political participation, highlighting modern societies' changes that favour women's empowerment and establishing a link between cultural factors and women's participation in public life. Cultural influences provide actual and beneficial benefits for women's empowerment and political involvement [38].

Some challenges women face in Nigerian politics is 1) Finance is the foundation upon which successful businesses are built. Any candidate

must be prepared to raise the required funds to run a successful election campaign. The high expense of mounting an electoral campaign in Nigeria can be crushing for women (this includes party nomination forms, which can cost millions of naira, election campaigns, gifts to godfathers, people mobilisation, and money for political party leaders, among other things) [36]. Political position in Nigeria requires substantial financial backing, which some aspirants, including women, lack. Most Nigerian female candidates for these positions frequently struggle to meet their financial obligations, despite wavers provided by some political parties, and as a result, little or nothing can be done to outweigh their male counterparts in the political race.<sup>2</sup>). Godfatherism is one critical element in Nigerian politics. It is assumed that anyone that does not have the blessings of the godfather will not go anywhere in terms of contesting for any position, be it male or female.<sup>3</sup>) Lack of support from fellow women [39,40]. Most women will prefer to support a male counterpart in an election rather than supporting their fellow female folks.

## 7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since 1963, this study has looked at the evolution of women's political participation in democratic democracy. Despite the global gender equality effort, women's political representation in parliament has failed to reach 30%. Socioeconomic factors, political institutions, heritage, political thuggery and gangsterism, societal conventions and beliefs, and other factors all contribute to a culture that excludes women from important political arenas in Nigeria. To consolidate democracy in Nigeria, women must strive for prominence in mainstream political growth, as democracy can only be achieved with widespread popular engagement, both genders included. Conclusively, corrective measures such as mass sensitisation, rural-urban outreaches, more competitive ground for aspirants, funding, elimination of godfatherism, and so on should be adopted to address the low women's participation in Nigerian politics.

The issues identified in this study can be resolved by political and legislative efforts. The concepts and techniques of affirmative action, as demonstrated in Uganda, South Africa, and Rwanda, are encouraged in the Review of the 1999 Constitution. Affirmative action and quotas have been used to address the gender gap in political and bureaucratic development all around the world. Nigeria can benefit from these "best

practices" by putting them in place for the country's overall prosperity and well-being. Regardless of unprecedented developmental efforts, inequality between both genders persists, especially in the political terrain, because of a decade's lack of focus on gender-related issues. Gender as a catchphrase for closing the gender gap should be enough to push Nigerian politics forward and fix the social injustices that have been going on for generations in the way men and women treat each other.

This study has been able to add to the literature on women's participation in politics, especially in the area of how they have fared in key power positions in Nigerian politics right from the first republic to the fourth.

### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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