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# Gender Equality and Women Political Participation for Sustainable Development in Nigerian Forth Republic: Issues and Challenges

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**Abstract:** Political participation is a voluntary act which encompasses wide range of political activities, including voting at election, contesting for political and party offices, attending political rallies, joining political parties and many more. Although, these political activities are considered to be "free zone" to all qualified citizens, especially in liberal democracies irrespective of disparities in wealth, education and gender. In Nigeria, Women represent about 50% of the population, in spite of this, their level of political participation and their representation is very low. Their political participation is much being largely noticed only at the level of voting and latent support. Men are found to have dominated the political arena to the point of almost excluding women, yet all groups (women inclusive) seek to influence dispensation of power and influence decision making in the society. The study used qualitative method that is secondary source; books, Journal, Newspapers and internet material to examine the place of Nigerian women in politics, the reasons for their marginalization and low level of political participation. It concludes that the force of discrimination against women notwithstanding, the future is bright for women to participate in politics for sustainable development in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Gender Equality, Participation, Politics, Sustainable Development, Women

## Introduction

In recent times, there have been agitations

by women globally for adequate representation and participation in

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governmental positions (both in the legislature & executive). In most societies women constitute about 50% of the population. Afolabi, et al., (2003) indicated that women constitute over half of the world's population, contributing in vital ways to societal development. African women, especially in Nigeria are exploited and marginalized, despite, the fact that women total population in 2023 amounted to approximately 110.67 million, while the male population amounted to approximately 113,13 million inhabitants. (Aaron O'Neill, 2024), they are discriminated against in the political process. Women political participation is a matter of human right, gender equality, inclusive growth and general development as indicated in United Nations SDGs 5 that states gender equality for men and women.

The active participation and integration of experiences and perspectives of women, on equal terms with men, at all levels of decision-making process in Nigeria and political involvement is essential to the achievement of equality, democracy, peace, growth and sustainable development. Greater political empowerment of women often can leads to higher standards of living and positive developments in education, infrastructure and health (OECD, 2018). Women's inclusion in politics ensures that decision-making bodies reflect the diversity of the societies they represent and can provide a balanced perspective in designing and implementing rules, thus enabling an inclusive approach to policy making and service delivery, ((Mlambo & Kapingura 2019), OECD, 2014).

Notwithstanding these benefits, women in the 21st century are facing challenges in the sphere of public life or service both locally and globally. Women find

themselves under-represented in the legislature and executive positions at every nook and cranny of the globe, Kumar, 2018).

Women's active participation in political decision-making in Africa is still very low despite the global clamour for equal and effective involvement of women in politics. Rwanda is the only African country with more than 50 percent share of women in parliament. The country also has the highest percentage of women in parliament worldwide, (Daniel, C., et at., (2020). What is more common is under-representation of women in political spaces. In sub-Saharan Africa, according to a 2021 report by the World Bank, Nigeria had the lowest percentage, 4% of the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments. The recently concluded 2023 elections showed further reduction in the number of women who ran for elective offices compared to 2019, (Daniel, C., et at., (2020).

Last four years, a total of 235 women ran for Senate seats, which made up only 12 percent of a total of 1,904 candidates. For the House of Representatives, only 533 out of a total of 4,680 candidates were women, which constituted only 11 percent. Out of about 1,067 candidates who vied for governorship positions as cleared by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), 80 were females. That was only 7.5 percent women participation. Six women were presidential candidates out of 73 while 22 women out of 74 were vice-presidential candidates, (Kolawole, D. T, 2024).

At the end of the 2019 general election, only 62 women (seven women elected into Senate, 11 into the House of Representatives, 4 women as deputy

governors and 40 in 36 states House of Assembly) out of 2,970 candidates who contested for different political offices were elected, a ridiculously low 2 percent of the female candidates.

A decline from the 12 percent share of women who participated in the 2019 general election to 10 percent in 2023 is an indication that Nigeria is taking a backward slide from the attainment of equal participation of men and women in politics. This year, there was only one female candidate for president. None of the political parties presented a female candidate for the position of vice president. Out of the 419 governorship candidates, only 25 of them, or 6%, were women. For the senate seats, we had 92 women out of 1,101 candidates, which represent 8%. For the House of Representatives, 288 women were presented out of 3,122 candidates amounting to only 9% women participation with less than five percent success rate, this is a far cry from a proper representation. Hence, these concerns led to women Radio hosting the 7<sup>th</sup> Voice of Women Conference and Awards (VOW 2023) in Abuja, (Thomas-Odia, I, 2023, [Kolawole, D. T, 2024](#)).

### Literature Review

Although women groups across the country and top female politicians had been agitating for about 40 percent quota for women across all registered political parties for the 2023 general elections, nothing was done practically to effect this well informed advocacy, except for some recommendations by INEC that has little or no effect on the status quo. Before the electoral cycle fully kicked in, the Federal High Court in Abuja ordered the government to comply with the 35

percent affirmative action for women's participation in politics. But in March 2022, lawmakers in the National Assembly rejected a bill to amend the 1999 Constitution to make room for more women in the National and State Houses of Assembly and other related matters, (Punch Newspaper, 2024).

With this trend still going on, it is necessary to serve a reminder, that Nigeria is a signatory to a number of global bodies pushing for expansion of women inclusion in politics and government, including the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, which advocated for 30 percent affirmative action. The National Gender Policy also recommends 35 percent women participation in both elective and appointive positions, (Daniel, C. et al., 2020). The European Union Ambassador to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Samuela Isopi, in a two day visit to Nigeria stated that, the active participation of women in decision-making and politics remains important if Nigeria is to achieve equality, sustainable development, peace, and democracy. She noted that while women have the fundamental right to participate in political life, most of them still faces a lot of social, cultural, and financial challenges. She, therefore, reminded stakeholders, especially the National Assembly, that the ongoing constitution reform process presents Nigeria with a unique opportunity to join the league of progressive nations in promoting gender equality through the adoption of a legal framework that discourages discrimination based on gender, (Thisdays Newspaper, 2024),.

Tables 1 and 2 below further buttress our discussion so far in this section and

clearly demonstrate the age long domination of female gender by their male counterparts in diverse areas of political participation and representation in Nigerian politics.

**Table 1: Comparism of Women Representation from 1999 to 2023 Nigerian Elections**

**Source:** Ayetigbo, O, A (2022) and Okoronkwo-Chukwu (2013) & National Bureau of Statistics, (2023)

1999	2003		2007		2011		2015		2019		2023
	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	
1	0		1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
109	3(2.8)	109	4(3.7)	109	9(8.3)	109	7(6.4)	109	7(6.4)	109	8(7.3%)
360	12(3.3)	360	21(5.8)	360	25(6.9)	360	26(7.2)	360	22	360	11(3.05%)
									4(6.7)		
36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0
990	24(2.4)	990	40(3.9)	990	57(5.8)	990	68(6.9)	990	68(6.1)	990	45(4.5%)
829	18(2.2)	881	32(3.6)	887	52(5.9)	887	-	887	-	887	-
710	13(1.8)	774	15(1.9)	740	27(3.6)	740	-	740	-	740	-
6368	69(1.1)	6368	267(4.2)	6368	235(3.7)	6368	-	6368	-	6368	-

are yet to be proportionately represented in the position of authority in public life anywhere in the world and awareness of gender is a central feature of all as aspects of everyday life and society has become more and more widespread. So, it is appropriate to note that the role of women in every society is quite enormous and as such they are at the heart of development as they control most of the non-monetary economy (subsistence, agriculture, child-bearing and training, domestic labour and many others) and play an important role in the monetary economy such as; trading, wage, labour, employment, and others. As noted in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) goal 5, women’s equal participation with men in power and decision-making is part of their fundamental right to participate in political life, and at the core of gender equality and women’s empowerment, (United Nations, 2019).

Strategies to increase women’s participation in politics have been progressive through conventions, protocols and international agreements for gender mainstreaming but they are yet to prove effective in achieving gender equality in the highest government rankings ((Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019, Morobane, 2014). A major turning point in this women’s struggle worldwide could be traced back to July 16, 1848 Seneca Falls Convention in New York organized by the local female Quakers, Elizabeth Cady and Lucretia Mott (Faulkner, 2011). The convention demanded entirely equal treatment for both men and women such as right to education, right to practice any occupational skill, and more. The opening paragraph of the convention read:

... we hold these truths to be self-evident:

**Table 2: Trends of Women Deputy Governors in Nigeria since 1999 - 2023**

Election Year	No. of Women Deputy Governors
1999	1
2003	2
2007	6
2011	1
2015	4
2019	4
2023	6

Source: Adapted from Ogunyankin (2012) & National Bureau of Statistics, (2023)

According to (Nwankwo, 2012), women

*that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.... Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation – in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States.*

### **Gender Equality and Political Participation in Nigeria**

Notwithstanding that many countries, Nigeria inclusive ratify international conventions and protocols on gender equality and women political participation, the low level of women's representation in government and politics is a worrisome situation and thus raises the question of reasons behind low level of women's representation in government and politics. As reported by Chalaby (2017) and Radu (2018), half of the world's populations are women, but today women only hold 23% of all seats in parliaments and senates globally. According to George (2019), United Nations (UN) data reveals that only 22.8% of all national parliamentarians were women in 2016 (up from 11.3% in 1995), and only eleven women serve as head of state. The United Nations itself has their agencies headed predominantly by men. In Nigeria, statistics has shown unequal representation of women to men in political participation. In the 2019 general election, only Obiageli Ezekwesili (who later withdrew from the contest) represented the women fold as a contestant in the presidential election. In

2003, only one of the three women Presidential contestants, Dr. (Mrs) Sarah Jubril, was relatively heard of before the election even Prof. Comfort Oluremi Sonaiya of Kowa party, the only woman contesting for president in 2015 election in Nigeria and others were politically unknown personalities. Realizing the gender injustice that marked the 2003 People's Democratic Party (PDP) primaries, women leaders in the ruling (PDP) petitioned the then National Chairman of the party and physically protested to former President Olusegun Obasanjo (Olojede, 2009). Obasanjo merely affirmed that the socio-cultural context of Nigeria was not supportive of women's participation in governance (Ajayi, 2007). In line with the above, the major political parties recorded no single woman as an aspirant for the party's candidature in the primary election and it shows the extent of the level of inequality in gender political participation.

In line with the foregoing and also accounting for gross misrepresentation of women in politics, all the 36 state governors of the federation are males and their deputies also men dominated (33 males and 3 females) with Enugu state (South-East), Rivers state (South-South) and Ogun state (South-West). Another eye-opener is that the 8th National Assembly recorded only seven female senators and twenty female House of Representative members and the current senate has only 3 female senators to 103 of their male counterpart. The case of gender inequality in Nigerian political landscape is also supported by Agbalajobi (2010). He corroborated this deficiency in women participation and representation thus:

*Following two decades of military rule, statistics revealed that women only*

*secured 3% representation in contested positions in 1999, 4% in 2003, while in 2007 they made only 6%. This survey shows a poor representation of women in 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections. In 2003 in states like Adamawa, Cross River, Ebonyi, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Nasarawa, Oyo, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara, no woman was elected as member of the State House of Assembly... (Agbalajobi, 2010, p. 78).*

Women all over the world especially African women, Nigeria inclusive, have indeed over the years continued to suffer neglect and marginalization regarding gender equality and political participation and representation. It is against this background this study aimed at ascertaining how low the level of women political participation and engagement in politics as well as unraveling the reasons and causes for their low participation especially in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopted liberal feminism as its framework of investigation. It examines women's social roles, experiences, interests, chores and feminist politics in a variety of fields. Feminist theories and doctrines according to Okoli (2010) are diverse, but their unifying feature is a common desire to enhance, through whatever means, the social roles of women. Liberal feminism is the variety of feminism that works within the structure of mainstream society to integrate women into that structure. Liberal feminism theory emerged in the 19th century and is rooted in liberal ideology and social contract theory of government which advocates for the protection of individual rights and freedoms. Notable liberal feminist thinkers include Mary

Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, and Betty Friedan. It focuses on: (i) all people are created equal and should not be denied equality of opportunity because of gender, (ii) efforts on social change through the construction of legislation and regulation of employment practices, and (iii) inequality stems from the denial of equal rights. The goals of feminism are (i) to demonstrate the importance of women (ii) to reveal that historically women have been subordinate to men, and (iii) to bring about gender equality. In other words, feminists fight for the equality of women and argue that women should share equally in society's opportunities and scarce resources.

Liberal feminism has contributed significantly towards the advancements of women political participation by expansion of voting rights for women globally, rise in the number of women holding elected and appointed positions, adoption of gender-sensitive policies and laws addressing women's concerns.

Liberal feminism theory in women's political participation emphasizes the importance of equal opportunities, individual rights, and freedom for women to engage in politics. Women should have equal opportunities to participate in politics, including voting, running for office, and holding leadership positions, women's individual rights and freedoms should be protected and respected, enabling them to make choices about their political engagement, women should be free from discrimination and bias in political processes and institutions, women's education and economic empowerment are crucial for increasing their political participation and leadership.

Liberal feminist strategies for increasing women's political participation include;

legislative reforms which advocating for laws and policies promoting gender equality in politics, quotas and affirmative action measures should be implemented to increase women's representation, political education and training should be provided to enhance women leadership skills. The theory also supports establishing networks and mentorship programs to encourage and sustain women's political engagement.

In this present study, the liberal feminist theory has relevant applicability in studying, understanding and explaining gender inequality in Nigeria. Women indeed are not equally accorded similar opportunity with the male counterpart owing to the fact that they are considered out of historical, biological and cultural values the weaker sex. This has dented the socio-political and economic essence of social existence. It bedevils the foundation on which their qualities are relegated only to domestic consequences. Liberal feminism also connects with one of the objectives of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially goal five, which focuses on gender inequality and women discrimination in politics.

Liberal feminism has been criticisms for focusing primarily on individual empowerment, potentially neglecting structural barriers, overemphasizing formal equality, potentially overlooking substantive inequality, not adequately addressing intersectional issues (e.g., race, class, sexuality) in women's political participation. Overall, liberal feminism has played a crucial role in advancing women's political participation and continues to shape feminist thought and activism in this area.

### **Factors Affecting the Extent of Women**

#### **Political Participation and Representation in Nigeria**

Gender equality in politics has been achieved to some level in some parts of the world, especially in the development countries, however, there are some factors limiting its success in other parts of the world especially in developing countries, like Nigeria. Some of those factors affecting women political participation and representation in Nigeria are:

**Culture:** Culture has persistently come up as one of the factors that hinder the participation of women in politics. People's norms, beliefs and traditions constitute the greatest factor responsible for gender inequality and women discrimination in governance. This is a key factor because it is an character issue. Deep-rooted traditions and socio-cultural beliefs about what women can or cannot do have hampered women's participation in politics.

Oladunmi (2009) argued that culture is the basic barrier to women in authority positions in the Nigeria state. He stressed that culture is the major cause of discrimination against women in Nigeria. Women's ability to engage politically both within and beyond the voting booth particularly as community organizers and elected officials is often shaped by norms that drive the social structures, traditional beliefs and cultural attitudes, is strong, particularly in rural areas. In a traditional Nigerian society, politics is believed to be the duty of the man, since he is the head, participating in politics automatically bestows one with power; it is generally accepted that only men be allowed to exercise such political power.

In line with the above, Abiola, (2010) opines that Nigerian women are

socialized into culture of female subordination where they are made to believe that they are inferior to the men by every given standard. Women are not only subordinate to men in their husband's family cultural setting but are also socialized to believe that in the society, authority position is men's business. An accumulation of the above manifestations and subordinations affects women in position of authority by depriving them self-esteem.

Collier (1974) argues that women are rarely seen as political actors, but rather as pawns to be used in the political manoeuvres by men and hoarded for their productive, reproductive and prestige-enhancing value or traded to create and cement alliances. She noted that male informants often speak of women as pawns. Women are usually excluded from meaningful political gatherings; they are seen to be ineligible for political office, only used as praise singers for men vying for political offices or occupying political offices and are most times occupied with child-rearing and domestic tasks.

The family of course is the main institution of patriarchy which is an important concept of explaining gender inequality. Literally, it means the rule of the father, more broadly, it refers to a society ruled and dominated by men over women. This is inherent in most African families. Giving men a higher social status over females has crept into public life, which reflects in state activities. The socialization of children to expect and accept different roles in life has created a social mechanism for the development of values that engender the several forms of discrimination against women.

Following from the above, the patriarchal system and its consequences especially as

regards the traditionally held attitudes to women in decision-making positions is another fundamental problem facing women in politics. The patriarchal system determines when a woman should enter politics, how she should go about it, the extent she is permitted to go and where she dares not venture into; else she will meet defeat. A woman's roles in the family are seen as her primary reason for existence. The patriarchal system has helped so much to subdue and dominate women's abilities and capabilities in all spheres of life, politics inclusive. For instance, patriarchy demands that women take permissions from their husbands and as such, be granted before they can join any political party or vie for position. Also, a country's culture determines how women in politics are perceived. In Nigeria, women politicians are negatively perceived, they are seen by others and media (even by other women) as women of easy virtue who are prone to promiscuity in a bid to get nominated and win elections (EMC, 2014). Politics is also seen as a domain for women who have no husbands, whose husbands are former politicians and women who are single. All these perceptions pose challenges to women politicians and those intending to be (Lawai, 2015).

In fact, in Nigeria, women are usually socialized from birth to see their place as a second fiddle. The birth of a male child is warmly received. To show the preference for the male child, women often feel that their place in their matrimonial homes is not secured until they give birth to male children especially in the eastern part of Nigeria. Cultural practices are often harmful to women; some of these harmful practices include burial rites that ensure that women remain social outcasts common also in



the eastern parts of the country. Widows are forced to drink the bath water of their dead husbands as part of the mourning process; Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF), that results from early marriage of teenage girls in the Northern part of Nigeria. Victims of these cultural practices can hardly participate socially as they are viewed as outcasts a number of barriers are imposed on women active participation in politics by cultural practices. Nigerian society is permeated by patriarchy whereby women are expected to conform to and confine themselves to male dominance and female subservience. Women are seen to belong to the home, be incapable of making sound decisions and it is unbecoming of women to expose themselves in public for political activities such as campaign rallies. Men often find it incredible and impracticable to see women participating in politics. (Iloh and Ikenna, 2009:124; Nda, 2003: 336).

**Religion:** Religion is another critical factor that hinders or psychologically affects women's political participation in Nigeria. Nigerians are deeply religious, with Islam, Christianity and Traditional religion accounting for the major religion in the country. Being religious in nature, the Nigerian populace has over the years been strong adherents of the teachings of their religion. Starting from the oldest religion in the country (Traditional religion), the women usually do not participate in any decision making outside the immediate family setting. This of course has crystallized along culture to psychologically hinder political participation of women.

To the Christian faithful, many leadership roles in the organized church are

prohibited to women. For example, in the Roman Catholic Church as well as the Anglican Communion in Nigeria, only men may serve as priests, deacons, etc., as well as senior leadership positions such as pope, patriarch and bishops. Though very few mainstream protestant denominations are beginning to relax their longstanding constraints on ordaining women in their leadership posts, while some are also tightening their constraints in reaction (SBC, 2018). The Christian denominations that deny women leadership positions in their order has backed their tradition on many texts in the bible, for example Colossians 3:18, 1 Peter 3:1, Ephesians 5:22-23, Titus 2: 4-5 among others, and these texts basically placed men above women in authority and positions of power. It is also easy to notice how the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ were women or female deficient.

In Islam, men and women are moral equals in God's sight and are expected to fulfill the same duties of worship, prayer, faith, almsgiving, fasting and pilgrimage to Mecca. Social responsibility in Islam is derived from the Qur'anic verse which states: "And (as far) the believers, both men and women, they are friends and protectors of one another: they (all) enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong." (Qur'an Surah Tauba: 71). The injunction laid down in the verse compels women and men to perform for the progress of society; hence a person in an individual capacity is encouraged to take active role in society rather than just a passive one. However, when they endeavor to assert themselves as Muslim women, they are labeled of being influenced by the West and putting Muslims and Islam to disgrace (Rahman and Memon 2015). In

line with the above, it is a rarity to see or witness a woman leading prayers or serving as an Imam in the presence of men.

It have been argue by some scholars that the status of women in pre-modern Islam in general conform not to Qur'anic ideals but to prevailing patriarchal cultural norms and questions the social restrictions on women especially regarding education, seclusion, strict veiling, polygamy etc. In the Northern part of Nigeria, where Islam is the predominant religion, the women are rarely seen participating in politics. For instance in the northern and some other parts of Nigeria, women are held in Purdah in deference to Islam. The implication of this is that only their husbands can have unfettered access to them and their movement is restricted to their quarters. They are at the mercies of the husband for the needs to be met. The conditions of their lives can be best left to conjecture as most households subsist below the poverty line. Religion ensures that a significant number of women are shut out from participating in politics either as voters or as aspirants into elective offices and also participating in economic activities.

**Finance/Economic Factor:** Economic status of women plays a significant role in enhancing their representation and participation in politics. Onazi (2014) states that in the world of politics, the participation of women is an difficult task that requires huge finance. In Nigeria, most people survive on less than \$2 a day, hence the tag; a potentially rich country with a poor population (Adepoju 2011, Okeke, Nnamani & Nduba 2018). Statistics on poverty in Nigeria indicate that 70% of poor Nigerians are women

(National Bureau of Statistics 2010).

Economic status or the finance available to candidates in election contest to a great extent is a major determinant in political participation and representation in Nigeria. Large finance is part of condition for successful campaign as political campaigns are expensive and requires a robust financial backing. Few women in Nigeria no doubt do not have the resources to finance an election campaign and this account as a factor that hinders their active participation in politics and also contesting for election. Finance or economic status is a major factor affecting women participation in politics it is also remotely related to culture. Societal values shape the financial status of women, men are generally seen not only as the breadwinners in the typical Nigerian homes, but, also as those who sponsor (usually small scale) economic venture of the women fold. The high cost of financing political parties and campaigns is a big obstacle to women. The minimum cost of gubernatorial election could go as high as 200 million naira. How many women can mobilize such huge amount of money and how many men can mobilize such amount of money for women? Which political party would nominate a woman for that post considering her very small contribution to party finance and formation? (Nda,2003:338). One of the frightening monsters that politics invokes is the figure of a pot-bellied, kindly male figure that holds domain in a political party as a godfather. His role is not mentoring, rather the godfather's brief is to provide a robust war chest and clear the path for the emergence of the godson or daughter for the contested office. In return the godfather is for unrestricted access to the corridors of power and inflated contracts

that are rarely executed. For a process that requires tons of cash to buy votes and compromise conscience, candidates without deep-pockets and money bags as backers cannot actualize their dreams of contesting for public office. Nomination forms to contest for elective offices in most parties are very expensive for presidential or governor could be as high as 80 to 100 million or even more. The average earnings of Nigerian women partly explain why they are reluctant about active participation in politics. In view of the exorbitant fees charged by political parties for aspirant to run for elections one can safely ascribe the back seat role of cheerleaders and clappers that women have settled for in these collectives. On the economic frontier, limited access to credit/finance also scuttles women's dreams of participation. Against this backdrop, one can easily deduce that the lack of solid financial base is indeed a major constraint to an effective participation of women in Nigerian Politics. Women lack the economic base which would enhance their political participation.

**Violence and Threat:** Elections indeed among other things create a channel for competitiveness that allows public offices to be keenly contested for by qualified candidates with a view to rendering selfless services to the people (Nnamani, Nduba & Nwanolue, 2019). Since the inception of Nigeria's fourth republic in 1999, there have been six general elections into executive and legislative positions in the country. Elections in Nigeria have been marked by gross irregularities including violence as a recurring decimal. These irregularities are occasioned by the very nature of politics and/or electoral contest in Nigeria

which is patterned on the zero sum game coupled with the emerging stage of democracy in the country. Arguing along this trajectory, Okeke, Nnamani and Nduba (2019) states that, "most political positions in Nigeria are contested as "do or die affair" because it is a means of having access to national cake and acquiring wealth, not service to the people. Evidence has shown that those who occupied political positions in Nigeria since 1999 remarkably enrich themselves overnight.

This pattern of politics of winner takes all and loser losses all has further worsened strong hegemonic contest for power. Politics is therefore seen by many as a means or avenue for quick and massive accumulation of wealth and power. This tough contest for power in Nigeria has taken many dimensions including but not limited to, ballot box snatching, intimidations, thuggery, threats and assassinations and outright results manipulations. (Egharevba & Ovenseri-Ogbomo, 2018).

Election violence is a coercive and deliberate strategy used by political actors, either the incumbent party and/or opposition parties to advance their interests or achieve specific political goals in relation to electoral contest. As a consequence, many politicians resort to illicit electoral strategies and make use of militant youth wings, militias or the security forces to either win the election or strengthen their post-election bargaining positions (Mlambo, et al., 2019; Okeke, et al, 2019, Zakari, A. 2015).

Electoral violence is one problem that has been identified as a stumbling block to robust participation of women in the political process and in governance. Violence against women is used as a

targeted and destructive tool in various ways throughout the electoral cycle to dissuade women from participating as election administrators, candidates and even voters. According to the United Nations (2015), an Afro-barometer survey showed that women feel a sense of vulnerability to political intimidation and violence. Violence against women in elections could be obvious or indirect; beyond violence that does physical harm, there is violence manifesting in terms of gender based hate speech, with sinister aim of deterring women from presenting themselves as candidates or voting elections. It of note, that political violence and the social stigma that politics is a dirty game is a further stumbling block for women to enter active politics. The failure to address these barriers creates an atmosphere that makes women to have negative attitude towards political activities. This negative nature of politics in Nigeria has been noted as a serious impediment to political participation of women. Women that are well qualified and with the right policy initiative that will engender much needed development in the state feels threatened by this very nature of politics and therefore shy away from politics.

### **Structural and Institutional Barriers:**

Structural and institutional constraints or barriers to gender equality, women political participation and representation in Nigeria. Structural barriers facing women in Nigeria include the level of socio-economic development of the state, the career and professional status of women. The socio-economic hindrances include unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, access to education, lack of sufficient financial resources, dual role women play in the family, full time job

and their choice of profession (EMC, 2014). This is also evidenced in the perceived and/or real lack of work balance in politics, limited infrastructure (such as child care or parental leaves) and working arrangements.

Most women deliberately shy away from politics due to perceived and/or real inability to balance work and life as patterned by the expectations of women as being primary caregivers within their families and households. This is also influenced by the meetings, assignments and engagements of the political parties in the late hours in the night or very early in the morning, difficulties to predict the working hours of politicians especially parliamentarians, travel requirements and uneven access to quality childcare (OECD, 2018).

Institutional barriers also account for factors that discourage women from participating actively in politics. Institutional barriers include limitations such as political systems that operate through rigid schedules that do not take into consideration women's domestic responsibilities and (if any) the type of electoral quotas (Kangas, Haider, Fraser & Browne, 2015). The manner in which politics and political parties are structured especially in Nigeria and most developing countries is that women have limited chances to be well or adequately represented. The establishment and organization of the political arena are shaped around and favours men than women. The present political arrangement is a product of long established political processes which were mainly male dominated. Men have always been at the helm of affairs; making and implementing policies. It is therefore easy to overlook and/or take lesser knowledge of women's issues and

their possible involvement in years to come may not likely be looked into. Although, it may not necessarily be a deliberate act but that of an omission especially since Nigeria is a patriarchal society; women's interests and involvement in politics are subsumed in men's. This Institutional fault is foundational to women under representation in elective posts because they were never part of the making of the rules and regulations guiding political activities in the country. Women are, so to say, late comers in the political scene. This perhaps is one of the greatest psychological weapon hampering women active participation in politics as the length of time they (men) have enjoyed dominance over women is often not well emphasized or taking adequate cognizance of.

**Media Portrayal:** Socially created gender roles and stereotyping are seen as the bedrock of gender inequality but they have been nurtured by the mass media. Since the mass media has the ability to facilitate attitude change and opinion formation, then their way of gender representation has done more harm than good in the struggle for gender sensitivity in politics. The mass media continue to reproduce discriminatory stereotypes about women and portray them in sexist ways. According to Datyan-Gevorgyam (2016), stated that if the mass media were to be divided into two categories, such as fictional and news reporting, then in the former, women are often associated with the household or sex-objects, and in the latter categories, they lack roles. Omenugha (2005) explains that the media in Nigeria seem to uphold the status quo through excluding women, giving them little voice, demeaning them through

various forms of stereotype and increasing their vulnerability, thereby also contribute to the trapping of women in the vicious cycle of poverty. Women are not positively represented in the media; they are often portrayed as victims or criminals thereby degrading images of women. Okunna (1992) states that news makers are dominated by men and the mass media are guilty of the stereotyping of women. Also Nyondo (2005) observes that journalists prefer male sources to female sources. She posits that “the masculine newsroom has spilled into the stories journalists write. The criteria of „importance“ in news worthiness becomes an issue when a reporter quotes female sources. The questions are: What does she know about the topic? What is her level of education? Who is she in society?” The numbers and proportion of women involved in the making of news are significantly lower than those of their male counterparts and thus influences the proper representation of women in the media (Council of Europe, 2013).

In every society, public attitude regarding the role of women are the major factors in deciding the status of women. In shaping these attitudes, the media exerts a strong influence. The images of women in mass media content, news, entertainment, advertising and so on is thus seen by feminists as a crucially important topic because this image will undoubtedly be reflected in the attitudes of society towards women in the long run (Sandman et. al, 1976). Their attitudes whether negative or positive would be structured and delivered to them by the media. This would make them have little or no interest in participating actively in politics.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The study is based on the global agitation

and attention to the role or low numbers of women in politics as a way of human right, gender equality, and inclusive growth for sustainable development. The study made an attempt to ascertain the level of political participation and representation of women in Nigeria and also to understand the factors that hinders their participation in politics.

The study revealed that there is a massive gap with gender inequality in Nigerian politics as women are still not playing active role in politics in comparison to their male counterpart. Furthermore, the study maintained that factors such as culture, religion, finance, nature of elections, media portrayal, structural and institutional barriers play a significant role in influencing the level women's political participation and representation in Nigeria.

Against this backdrop, the study recommends that since culture is not stagnant, the government through various agencies such as National Orientation Agency and the mass media should adopt strategies towards re-orientation of the public the importance and necessity of women participation in politics that will enhance sustainable development. In the same vein, appropriate laws should be passed (if the available ones are not enough or limited in scope) and thoroughly enforced to drastically reduce the negative nature of elections in the country to enable level playing ground for all devoid of all forms of threats, harassment and intimidations.

Also religious practice should be done in such that it does not impedes women participation but the ones that encourages them as it is practiced in other developed countries that allow women participation in politics.

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