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MAKING WOMEN COUNT: AN APPRAISAL OF WOMEN-CENTERED POLICIES OF NIGERIA POLITICAL PARTIES

This article examines the effectiveness of various policies and strategies aimed at promoting women's participation in politics in Nigeria, implemented by advocacy groups, international organizations, political parties, and the Nigerian government. Despite the legal right of women to engage in politics and governance, cultural beliefs have hindered their active involvement in politics, leading to inadequate representation of women in politics. By liberal feminist theory, the study evaluates women's responses to these initiatives, the challenges encountered in implementing them, and how political parties can enhance their effectiveness. The article suggests that legislative reform is necessary to enable women to achieve equal status to men in society, which will boost women's political participation. Furthermore, it argues that Nigeria's political parties have not done enough to encourage women's participation in politics. Hence, political parties should establish a welcoming and inclusive environment accommodating women's needs. To achieve this, political parties should organize party meetings at convenient and accessible times and places for women, eliminate obstacles that impede women's participation in politics, develop gender-sensitive training programs to enhance women's confidence and skills, and establish mentoring programs to support potential women candidates in navigating the political landscape.

Keywords: gender; gender equality; liberal feminism; political participation; political party

INTRODUCTION

Globally, there has been a growing concern regarding the inadequate representation of women in political positions. Despite constituting half of the world's population, women continue to be underrepresented in the decision-making process across all levels of governance (Nwabunkeonye 2014). Non-governmental organizations, international agencies, and political parties have implemented various mechanisms and strategic plans to enhance women's political participation. However, the progress made towards improving women's political representation has been limited worldwide.

The issue of women's underrepresentation in politics is a global one, with even mature democracies like the United States struggling with the problem. However, the socio-cultural contexts and entrenched patriarchal institutions in developing countries make the issue more complex than in Western countries. Interestingly, African women seem to be relatively politically empowered in comparison to other regions, at least in terms of the percentage of women in parliament, ministerial positions, and the number of female heads of state in the last 50 years. For example, Liberia produced Africa's first elected female president, Ellen Sirleaf Johnson, in 2005, and since then, two other women have been elected as presidents in Africa. Rwanda is the global leader in terms of the percentage of women in parliament and ministerial positions, with 61% of women in parliament and 55% of women in ministerial positions. In addition, Rwanda had a female prime minister for a brief period in 1993-1994, which helped raise its ranking to the sixth position on the political empowerment sub-index of the 2021 Global Gender Gap Report. South Africa, Mozambique, and Namibia are also among the top 20 countries in terms of political empowerment (Ette & Akpan-Obong 2022).

Indeed, roughly twelve nations across the world have achieved a representation of over 30 percent of women in their legislative houses, with approximately five nations surpassing 40 percent. Notably, Rwanda stands out as the leading country, having elected more than 60 percent of women to various elective positions (IPU 2015). In contrast, Nigeria's efforts towards increasing women's political representation have been unsatisfactory, despite initiatives by advocacy groups, international agencies, political parties, and the Nigerian government to encourage more women to participate actively in politics. This circumstance falls below the recommended benchmarks of the Beijing Platform of Action, which recommends a minimum of 30% women representation, and the National Policy on Women in Nigeria, which suggests a target of 35% (Nwabunkeonye 2014). In line with global perspectives, women constitute

half of Nigeria's male population, but cultural beliefs remain a significant obstacle that has impeded women's active involvement in politics, resulting in a nightmare for women's political representation.

Nonetheless, section 42(1) of the Nigerian Constitution of 1999 explicitly states that "A citizen of Nigeria from any community, place of origin, ethnic group, dialect, sex, religion, or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he or she is such a person, be subjected to any form of discrimination".

Thus, Nigerian women possess the legal right to engage actively in politics and governance. For instance, the Electoral Act 2022 stipulates the requirements for participating in elections in the country. First, individuals must be Nigerian citizens to ensure that only citizens have the right to participate in the elections. Second, they must have reached the age of 18 years, ensuring that only adults can register as voters. Third, individuals need to be residents, work in, or originate from the Local Government, Area Council, or Ward covered by the registration center, emphasizing local connections and participation. Additionally, individuals must present themselves to registration officers in person, emphasizing active engagement with the registration process. Finally, individuals must not have any legal incapacity to vote under the laws, rules, or regulations in Nigeria, preventing those with certain legal restrictions from registering as voters. Collectively, these criteria aim to establish an inclusive, transparent, and fair electoral system that upholds democratic principles by ensuring that only eligible individuals who meet these requirements can participate in the voter registration process. These criteria do not in any way limit the chances of women to participate in politics and the governance process.

Although women's participation in politics has witnessed a significant increase concerning certain benchmarks, such as the number of women who cast their ballots during elections (Nwabunkeonye 2014), the participation of women in partisan politics remains low, despite the implementation of several policies and strategies by international agencies, the Nigerian government, and political parties to promote women's active participation in politics. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the efficacy of these strategies in promoting women's inclusivity within political parties, women's responses to the initiatives, the obstacles to the implementation of these strategies, and how political parties in Nigeria can make these policies more effective.

In recent years, international civil society organizations have played a significant role in supporting the development of female politicians in major cities, alongside local initiatives. In 2018, UN Women organized a conference to address the issue of women's underrepresentation in politics. The outcome of the conference was the

Nigerian Women's Charter of Demands, which highlighted the importance of political commitment to gender equality, increased women's participation, and principled leadership. Although the charter received endorsements from all political parties except the ruling party APC, the efforts made did not lead to significant progress in women's representation during the 2019 general elections (Ette & Akpan-Obong 2022).

To encourage women's involvement in the political process, certain political parties have implemented measures, such as waiving membership dues, providing free nomination forms, and assisting with campaign expenses. For example, iKnow Politics (2009) reported an initiative that offered women the opportunity to obtain nomination forms without cost. Prior to the 2019 general elections, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) took the initiative to distribute nomination forms to women free of charge to increase their participation. However, despite these efforts, women's aspirations and candidacy did not show a significant boost, and there was no noticeable increase in the percentage of women elected. It is worth noting that while the nomination forms were free, female aspirants still had to pay for the expression of interest forms, with substantial costs ranging from N100,000 to N2 million, depending on the position sought (Agina-ude & Fijabi 2020).

In contrast, the All Progressives Congress (APC) made a written commitment to waive fees for the expression of interest and nomination forms. However, these waivers were generally rejected by women who saw them as further marginalized. As a result, the APC reinstated the financial requirements but reduced the fees by half for women's aspirants and candidates. The party also promised to mobilize and campaign on their behalf. Nevertheless, the reduced fees remained significant and, in some cases, were not waived. For instance, in Anambra State, Onyinye Okongwu, an aspiring candidate for the Idemili North seat of the State House of Assembly, revealed that only 5% of the expression of interest fee was waived for her (Agina-ude & Fijabi 2020). Looking ahead to the upcoming 2023 elections, the APC has announced its decision to provide free forms of nomination to female aspirants. This step was taken by the party's leadership with the aim of promoting the greater inclusion of women in the political sphere (Akinwale 2022).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: LIBERAL FEMINISM THEORY

Liberal feminism emerged during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, with prominent figures such as Mary Astell, Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Virginia Woolf advocating women's rights and

equal participation in public life (Ackerly 2001). These feminists challenged the discriminatory laws and practices that treated women as legal dependents and sought to secure their voting rights, access to education, and individual rights.

Liberal feminists drew upon the principles of equality and individual freedom within liberal tradition, emphasizing personal independence, economic opportunities, and equality for all individuals (Ackerly 2001; Wolff 2007). They argued against sex-based discrimination and believed that education and professional opportunities are crucial for individual development and societal progress. However, early liberal feminists often overlooked the specific challenges faced by working-class women and failed to adequately address their circumstances (Ackerly 2001).

Liberal feminists highlight the barriers women face in entering and succeeding in the public sphere, including social norms, labor patterns, and formal laws. They argue for equal opportunities and expectations for women, aiming to reform existing economic, political, and social structures to create a system in which women and other marginalized groups can succeed on par with men. By contrast, Marxist/socialist feminists view the systemic exploitation inherent in class-based societies as a hindrance to women's advancement (Tong 2012).

Sociologists focusing on women's experiences have identified the role of marriage and family in perpetuating gender roles and expectations, which limits options for both men and women (Wolff 2007). The traditional nuclear family structure has been used to justify the division of labor, placing an unequal burden on women in terms of childcare, household responsibilities, and support for their husbands' careers. Liberal feminists have also advocated for women's rights to privacy and control over their bodies, which becomes complex when addressing issues related to sexuality, healthcare, and reproduction. While liberal feminism has been influential in advocating for women's rights and political inclusion, it has faced criticism for its narrow focus on abortion rights and its failure to comprehensively analyze the social structures that perpetuate gender inequality (Wolff 2007).

This paper is grounded in liberal feminist theory because of its focus on women's systematic exclusion from personal autonomy and representation in important spheres of modern life. Liberal feminists advocate for women's full political inclusion and incorporation into mainstream contemporary politics. Allison Jaggar, a modern proponent of liberal feminism, emphasizes that despite formal equality, women still face discrimination in hiring and promotion, leading to lower chances of obtaining desired outcomes compared to men (Jaggar 1983).

Liberal feminists identify the under-representation of women in national and international politics and suggest various means of overcoming obstacles to political participation (Ryan 2003). Factors contributing to low representation include domestic responsibilities, cultural attitudes, lack of support from the family, lack of confidence, and insufficient financial resources (WFUNA 2018). Legislative reform is a primary focus of liberal feminism, seeking changes within existing systems to achieve equal status for women, rather than addressing the root causes (Meghan 2014). The goal is to achieve parity between men and women, with equal representation in politics reflecting the large population (Meghan 2014).

Liberal feminism is not without its criticism. Some critics argue that liberal feminism seeks entry into existing institutions rather than advocating fundamental change. This criticism led to divisions within the Women's Liberation Movement, with radical feminism emerging as a response, calling for transformative changes in social systems and structures (Wolff 2007).

WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA, 1999-2023

The participation of women in Nigerian politics has been inconsistent since the country transitioned to civil rule in 1999. While the percentage of women's representation in the lower parliament reached its peak of 7.0% in 2007, the figures decreased to 6.8% and 5.6% in 2011 and 2015, respectively (Orji, Orji, & Agbanyim 2018). The government has attempted to increase women's representation by adhering to international agreements and enacting national policies. Women's participation in elective and appointive offices in Nigeria has remained around 6%, lower than the West African sub-regional average of 15%, with only marginal improvements achieved through government-sponsored capacity-building programs, such as women's empowerment and seminars (Ete & Akpan-Obong 2022).

Reports from the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics in 2018 show that only a small percentage of women held councilor positions, were appointed as judges in federal courts, and held high-level government positions. However, the Nigerian government has attempted to improve women's representation in government, with the number of women elected to both houses of the legislature increasing from an average of 2.3% between 1999 and 2007 to 7.8%, though there was no significant increase in 2011. The 2015 election saw only 5.6% of women being elected to the Lower House and 6.4% to the Upper House, ranking Nigeria 180th in the world in terms of women's political participation (Orji, Orji, & Agbanyim 2018).

The challenges faced by female politicians in Nigeria include economic resources that are greater than those experienced by their male counterparts (Ette & Akpan-Obong 2022). As of January 2021, women made up 10.3% of ministerial positions and 5.8% of parliament members in Nigeria, with the country ranking 149th out of 155 countries in political empowerment on the 2021 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report. In the overall global gender gap index for 2021, Nigeria ranks 139th out of 156 countries, with a 63% gender gap based on four indicators: educational attainment, health and survival, economic participation and opportunity, and political empowerment (Ette & Akpan-Obong 2022).

Women's underrepresentation in Nigeria's National Assembly remains a significant concern, with historical data showing that since 1999, only 157 women have been elected, compared to 2,657 men. The recent 2023 elections have further highlighted the failure to implement measures that support women's political involvement, as evidenced by the low success rate of female candidates. Out of the 92 women who contested for Senate seats, only three emerged as winners, while 15 out of 286 women secured seats in the House of Representatives. Despite 18 political parties fielding 380 female candidates, the overall representation of women remained disappointingly low (Okafor & Ileyemi 2023). Moreover, the gender gap is evident in voter registration, with 52.5 percent of registered voters being male and 47.5 percent female. Nigeria's ranking of 184th out of 192 countries for women's representation in the national parliament emphasizes the severity of the issue (Okafor & Ileyemi 2023).

The current composition of the ninth National Assembly reflects the limited presence of women in positions of power, with only 21 female members out of 469. The situation is not much different at the sub-national level, where out of 990 state House of Assembly members, only 45 are women. Additionally, 15 out of the 36 states have no female representation at all (Okafor & Ileyemi 2023).

The trend of low female representation in Nigerian politics is persistent. In previous assemblies, such as the 1999-2003 and 2003-2007 periods, women held a meager 3.3 percent and 5.8 percent of seats in the House of Representatives, respectively (Okafor & Ileyemi 2023). Furthermore, the 2007 elections demonstrated a pattern of low female candidate participation, with only 8.8 percent of candidates being women (Okafor & Ileyemi 2023).

Currently, the outlook for the forthcoming 10th Assembly is concerning. Out of 378 women who ran for Senate and House of Representatives seats, only 17 were successful. This represents a projected representation of 3.62 percent in the incoming Assembly. Additionally, all female senators from the previous Assembly lost their re-

election bids, resulting in only three new female senators for the next Assembly. The number of women in the House of Representatives will decrease by three compared to the current Assembly. However, there will be seven new female members in the House, alongside seven who were reelected (Orizu 2023). In the gubernatorial and state houses of assembly elections, the number of female candidates remains low. Out of 837 candidates for governorship and deputy governorship positions, only 124 are women. Similarly, out of 10,231 candidates for state Houses of Assembly, only 1,019 are women (Orizu 2023).

The persistently low representation of women in the National Assembly calls for urgent action. Implementing inclusive policies, providing support for female candidates, and addressing societal barriers are essential steps toward achieving gender parity. Such efforts are crucial for ensuring equitable progress and diverse representation in Nigeria's political landscape (Okafor & Ileyemi 2023).

According to Nkereuwem (2023), in the 2023 electoral cycle, there were a total of 15,269 candidates, consisting of 13,725 male candidates and 1,544 female candidates. The elections also saw a decrease in the number of political parties from 76 to 18. However, women constituted only 10% of the candidates, with 9% at the federal level, and 11% at the state level. The analysis focuses on party-level factors that hinder women's access to competitive politics. Smaller parties tend to have lower barriers for women, with 96% of female candidates in the 2019 elections coming from such parties. In the 2023 cycle, women made up 11% of the candidates in small parties, while dominant parties showed a larger gender gap in national offices. However, the gender gap is smaller in subnational elections, especially for small parties.

Women tend to participate more in executive positions with limited power, such as vice president and deputy governor positions. In the 2023 cycle, women performed better as deputy governors at the subnational level, while fewer women ran in more competitive governorship primaries. Women were relatively more competitive in subnational legislative positions than in the House of Representatives and the Senate at the national level. However, female candidates for deputy governorship positions were more numerous than those in legislative positions, although these roles lacked substantive power. Despite the historical favorability of the vice presidential role of women, no woman vice presidential candidate has emerged from the dominant parties since 1999. This limits women's competitiveness, with the majority of female gubernatorial candidates belonging to smaller parties (Nkereuwem 2023).

The representation of female candidates varies across Nigeria's regions, with southern states outperforming northern states. In the 2023 elections, women ac-

counted for 9% of the candidates running federal legislative offices across all parties. The Northwest region had the lowest proportion of female candidates, while the Southeast region had the highest proportion.

Despite efforts made by the Nigerian government to improve women's representation in politics, the participation of women remains low and inconsistent. Female politicians in Nigeria face significant challenges related to economic resources, which are greater than those experienced by their male counterparts. Nigeria's poor ranking in the global gender gap index underscores the need for further efforts to increase women's political participation and empowerment in the country. Women in Nigerian politics often find themselves uncompetitive, especially at the national level. Novice female candidates face challenges because of their lack of political capital and competitive advantage. They also have lower advancement persistence, indicating a higher likelihood of dropping out after losing an election than their male counterparts (Nkereuwem 2023).

PROVISIONS BY INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES, CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS, GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL PARTIES TO ENCOURAGE WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

Despite various efforts made by international bodies, civil society organizations, and political parties to encourage active participation of women in politics through promoting gender equality, economic empowerment, security and peace building, gender education, and capacity building programs for leadership, advocacy, mentoring, funding, and networking opportunities, the involvement of women in politics has remained low since the return of democracy in 1999 in Nigeria. The effectiveness of implementing policies introduced by these groups seems to be weak and unable to withstand the test of time. Although various capacity building and behavioral change programs have been implemented to encourage active representation of women in politics, significant improvements have yet to be achieved (Kelly 2019).

Numerous attempts have been made to tackle the issue of underrepresentation of women in both elected and appointed roles in Nigeria. Some of these efforts include the creation of entities like the Women Political Empowerment Office, the Nigeria Women Trust Funds, and Women Lobby Group. Additionally, there have been initiatives like the development of an INEC gender policy, the national multi-stakeholder dialogue, the implementation of affirmative action, and the organization of the Nigeria

Women Strategy Conference. The National Center for Women Development is also working alongside the National Bureau of Statistics to gather empirical data on this matter (Oluyemi 2016).

In 2018, a conference sponsored by UN Women, the leading advocate for gender equality, brought together political parties to explore ways to address the problem of women's marginalization and lack of representation within political party governance and structure (Orizu 2018). One significant result of the conference was the Nigerian Women Charter of Demands, which identified three primary political priorities: (a) exhibiting political determination and dedication, (b) supporting women's political participation and representation, and (c) promoting gender equality and women's rights (Ette & Akpan-Obong 2022).

Several Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), supported by international development partners, have developed programs to encourage women to demand greater political representation in Nigeria. The number of CSOs in Nigeria is unknown, making it difficult to determine the number of organizations working to improve women's political representation. However, it is clear that prominent organizations like the Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC), Women Law and Development Centre, Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA), and Association of University Women are either founded by professionals or consist of professionals (Orji, Orji, & Agbanyim 2018).

PROVISIONS OF INTERNATIONAL BODY AND CIVIL SOCIETIES ORGANIZATIONS

Over the course of several years, a number of international organizations and civil society groups have prioritized women's political participation and devised strategies to promote gender equality in politics. Among these organizations is the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the National Democracy Institute (NDI), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), all of which fall under the umbrella organization known as "iKnow politics". Other organizations involved in these efforts include the Department for International Development (DFID), the European Union (EU), the Nigerian Women's Trust Fund (NWTF), Voice for Change (V4C), the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (MWASD), the Policy Advice and Legal Centre (PLAC), and others. These organizations are united in their goal of in-

creasing the participation and effectiveness of women in political life. They have utilized technology-enabled forums to provide access to critical resources and expertise, stimulate dialogue, create knowledge, and share experiences among women in politics (Orji et al. 2018).

The aforementioned organizations have made significant contributions to the global advancement of women, particularly with regards to gender inequality. They work in collaboration with government and civil society to design laws, policies, programs, and services necessary for the implementation of their initiatives. The organizations prioritize women's equal participation in all aspects of life, and though their specific focuses and priorities may vary, their ultimate objectives align.

One notable example is the UK Aid-funded £29 million programme called "Voice for Change (V4C)", which aimed to create an enabling environment for gender equality in Nigeria. The program targeted young women and men between the ages of 16 and 25, with a focus on three main areas: women's voice and leadership, women's role in decision-making, and violence against women and girls (Asubiaro-Dada & Gaynor 2017). V4C is a unique example of a program that applies social norms theory at scale and addresses the structural barriers to gender equality, particularly discriminatory and harmful attitudes, behaviors, and social norms (Kelly 2019). While V4C operated in four states in Nigeria, namely Enugu, Kaduna, Kano, and Lagos, its impact was far-reaching.

Nigeria Women Trust Fund (NWTF) is a civil society organization who works with the backing and supported by Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (MWASD), UN Women and others to help women into politics through funding, monitoring, training for leadership, advocacy and networking opportunities (Kelly 2019). The following are the objective of NWTF:

- To encourage women aspiring for political seat by providing support such as money for campaigns through transparent processes irrespective of their political inclinations.
- To facilitate networking opportunities for female politicians with the support from relevant organizations.
- To raise funds, invest and manage recourses for women's political participation in fulfillment of Nigeria's affirmative action quota, designating at least 35 percent of seat in political bodies to women.
- To enhance the leadership capacity of aspiring female politicians and women in appointed positions.

- To promote and carry out research and advocacy that raises awareness about the current situation of women in politics, and that generates support for women who currently hold or are seeking high elective or appointed position in government.

PROVISIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES TO ENCOURAGE WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

This section examines the pro-women provisions of political parties that promote women's political participation in Nigeria. Although there are no documented legal requirements for political parties to select or appoint a certain number of women candidates for government positions, political parties have attempted to incorporate measures that encourage more women to participate in political contests.

One such measure is the waiving of nomination form costs. In Nigeria, most political parties waive the cost of nomination forms for women aspirants who may have the vision for politics but lack the financial capacity to participate. In 2015, the two major political parties in Nigeria, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All-Progressives Congress (APC), waived nomination fees for women to encourage their inclusion in the government process. Despite these efforts, they did not translate to a significant increase in the number of women elected (Eucom 2015). The same initiative was also implemented in 2019, with all major political parties encouraging women to obtain nomination forms free of charge. This is particularly noteworthy because the cost of nomination forms among the leading political parties can be exorbitant.

Figure 1: Cost of PDP nomination form

Special Announcement

Sale of Party Forms for 2019 General Elections (All Categories)

1. The National Working Committee (NWC) of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) announces that the sale of Expression of Interests and Nomination Forms for the 2019 General Elections has commenced.

2. In line with our Party's guidelines for the conduct of Party Primaries for the 2019 General Elections, as approved by National Executive Committee (NEC), the details are as follows:

SN	Category	Expression of Interest	Nomination	Total
1.	Presidential	N2,000,000=	N10,000,000 =	N12,000,000=
2.	Governorship	N1,000,000=	N5,000,000=	N6,000,000=
3.	Senate	N500,000=	N3,000,000=	N3,500,000=
4.	House of Reps.	N500,000=	N1,000,000=	N1,500,000=
5.	House of Assembly	N100,000=	N500,000=	N600,000=
6.	National Delegates		N20,000=	N20,000=
7.	3 Ad-hoc Delegates		N5,000=	N5,000=

Source: Nairaland Forum (2018)

The two tables above show the high cost of nomination forms for the two major political parties in Nigeria. However, it is instructive that the forms are free for women aspirants.

Political parties have also established women wings or women groups to provide a platform for women to deliberate on matters of concern to them. A woman leader is appointed by party leaders to coordinate women within political parties. Additionally, parties disseminate information that prioritizes women, which could potentially attract more women voters. Parties also recruit women as party agents to monitor the election process at polling stations.

One of the policies of major political parties in Nigeria is the inclusion of women as part of the delegates during their conventions. Conventions are crucial events for political parties as they make important decisions, such as the selection of flag bearers during elections. The inclusion of women in this critical process indicates that political parties are making efforts to encourage women’s participation in the political process.

Figure 2: Cost of APC nomination form



Source: Lawal (2018)

The Nigerian government has taken significant institutional steps to improve women's political representation. One of these measures was the signing and ratification of the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1984 and 1985, respectively. In addition, various governments in Nigeria have implemented women's empowerment programs since the introduction of the Better Life Program for Rural Women (BLP) in 1987 (Orji et al, 2018). The National Commission for Women was established in 1989 and later upgraded to the Ministry of Women Affairs in 1995 to coordinate efforts aimed at advancing women's affairs in the country. The ministry has implemented legislative, policy, and administrative measures to improve women's political representation, including the adoption of the National Policy on Women in 2000 and the National Gender Policy in 2006. These policies aim to empower women, eliminate practices that marginalize them, and promote Affirmative Action to achieve 30% representation of women in government. The adoption of the National Gender Policy has prompted

other state institutions such as the National Assembly and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to adopt their own gender policies (Orji et al. 2018).

Previously, Nigerian political parties received criticism for providing little room for women’s representation. However, after interventions by different stakeholders, many political parties now claim to be conscious of gender issues. This is reflected in their manifestoes, which include plans to ensure that the objective of achieving 30% representation of women in political positions is met. Table 1 presents the various plans of some Nigerian political parties to encourage women’s involvement in politics, as outlined in their manifestoes.

Table 1: Political parties’ manifesto concerning women representation

Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	All Progressive Congress (APC)	Labour Party (LP)
Ensure gender equality in employment and socioeconomic advancement and promote greater women involvement and effective participation in politics.	Put in place measures that will ensure active participation of women in politics. Encourage female political aspirants by making nomination forms free for them, and encourage quotas for women participation. Make efforts so that women occupy up to 30% in party structures and government. Include gender as component of federal character.	Establish a 30 percent minimum quota in all appointive and elective positions shall be considered, and mechanisms for demanding and monitoring the implementation of such quotas should be developed. An Equal Opportunities Commission could be a viable organ to support this process.
All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA)	Social Democratic Party (SDP)	Young Progressive Party (YPP)
Sponsor public enlightenment programmes to fight gender inequality and gender insensitivities in every aspect of our national life and promote affirmative action by employers to place women in positions of authority. Encourage women to seek elective office in local governments, the states and at the federal level. Give women senior political appointments in the spirit of Beijing Declaration	Cultivate women and youth and ensure their fair representation and inclusion in key position of the party and government. Affirmative action and Proportional Representation (PR) are the two key political instruments through which the marginalization and exclusion of women and youth are being redressed all over the world and our party will equally use them.	Pursue policies enshrined in the Beijing Declaration. Ensure adequate women representation in all the organs and institutions of the party and of its government through enhanced participation of women in electoral contests and through political appointments.

Source: Orji et al. (2018)

Despite these efforts, women's political representation remains significantly low in Nigeria, indicating that the measures put in place by political parties to increase women's involvement in the political process have not been entirely successful.

IMPEDIMENTS TO PARTY PROVISION ON WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

The challenging nature of the political landscape in Nigeria poses a significant barrier to women's political participation. Women are often deterred due to their inherent physical and emotional limitations, making it difficult for them to contend with their male counterparts in a context of struggle, violence, and stress. As a result, despite the availability of free nomination forms, women's ability to compete equally with men remains limited (Olawale & Olabanji 2021).

The prevalence of hate speech against women in Nigeria during the 2015 election was investigated by the National Democratic Institute (NDI). The study, which utilized approximately 900 observers across Nigeria's 774 local government areas, revealed a high incidence of gender-based hate speech, often accompanied by acts of gender-based violence such as blackmail, threat of divorce, destruction of property, and sexual violence (NDI 2015).

The fear of the unknown is a significant obstacle to women's participation in politics. Women are typically averse to the atmosphere of rancor and violence that often characterizes political engagements. Unlike their male counterparts, most women are not disposed to employ thugs against their opponents. In the Nigerian context, these limitations impede women's adequate involvement in politics (Elaigwu 2017).

Inadequate support from family members, particularly husbands, is a significant challenge for women's political participation in Nigeria. The patriarchal nature of Nigerian society means that women often require the permission of their families to engage actively in politics. Housework and childcare responsibilities further limit women's ability to attend political meetings, particularly those held at night. Women are also often dissuaded from pursuing political ambitions due to the level of violence and the nocturnal nature of political engagements (Nwabunkonye 2014; Kelly 2019)

Financial constraints: The Nigerian political scene is known to be highly expensive, especially when it comes to campaigns and other political activities. Due to the high cost of politics, many women are hesitant to participate and invest their hard-earned money in a struggle that they may not be certain of winning. Additionally, many women in Nigeria are dependent on their families or husbands for financial

support, which often does not align with the huge spending required in Nigerian politics (Arowolo 2016).

Lack of media coverage: Female aspirants in Nigerian politics often face a lack of media coverage, as the patriarchal nature of the country tends to undermine the credibility of women in the political sphere. Many political programmes initiated by women in Nigeria are not documented or mentioned in the national history, making them irrelevant to the nation's heritage (Nwabunkeonye 2014). Moreover, media outlets tend to discriminate against female political campaigns and other electoral activities, thereby making it difficult for women to gain the necessary support to succeed in politics.

Constitutional restrictions: The Nigerian constitution also presents a barrier to women's active political participation. If a woman marries outside her state of origin, she cannot claim her husband's state of origin for political ambitions. This presents a challenge for women who have relocated to other states, as they may be regarded as non-indigenes and face intimidation upon returning to their state of origin (Ade-lakun 2018).

Lack of support from fellow women: Women often lack support from their fellow women in politics. Female leaders do not always have the confidence of their female constituents, who often prefer to support male candidates. Women's envy and jealousy of one another, in spite of their numerical strength, has placed Nigerian men at an advantage when it comes to mobilizing support for elections (Nwabunkeonye 2014). Additionally, women who are actively participating in politics are often subject to public ridicule by male counterparts, who use abusive language and derogatory names to describe women in politics, causing many women to withdraw from active participation in politics in Nigeria.

Gender discrimination by political parties: Political parties in Nigeria are often controlled by men, who dominate decision-making processes and funding. This makes it difficult for women to participate fully in the political process. Manifestoes and party constitutions rarely include affirmative action for women, and when they do, they are often insufficient. Discrimination against women within political parties is intentional and often takes the form of holding important meetings at night or requiring travel, which effectively excludes women from key positions within the party (Orji et al. 2018).

Unhealthy political environment: Nigerian politics is characterized by violence, intimidation, and assassination attempts. Women are often specifically targeted in both private and public spheres, preventing them from participating in rallies, voting,

or running as candidates. This poses a significant threat to Nigerian democracy and efforts to reduce incidents of violence against women must be prioritized (Kelly 2019).

Financial barriers: The cost of seeking elective positions in Nigeria is prohibitively expensive, particularly for women. Large amounts of money are required for primaries and campaigns, and a nomination form for women still requires the influence of elders. Direct primaries used by parties are often costly, and only a small number of party leaders are in a position to choose candidates. The high cost of running for elective office is a significant barrier to the full participation of women in Nigerian politics (Nwabunkeonye 2014; Hodo et al. 2015).

MECHANISMS FOR BOOSTING WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

To enhance the competency of women candidates, research has shown that skills-based training is beneficial. Thus, it is recommended that both political parties and the Nigerian government provide monitoring and training programs for women who are members of political parties and women candidates in the country. Such competency programs should focus on building women's platforms, networks, and pools of potential candidates. Consistent and ongoing training by parties and government has been shown to yield better results. The training can include encouraging women to build fundraising networks to reduce the financial obstacles they may face. Orientation programs for newly elected women governance skills can also enhance their active participation in politics (USAID 2016).

Furthermore, political parties should adopt policies and techniques that provide financial assistance and aid to female aspirants. The assistance should not only cover campaign expenses but also alleviate their financial burden and passion for political participation. Considering the recent rise in campaign costs, it is crucial for political parties to provide financial assistance and incentives to women candidates during campaigns. Such assistance can include building fundraising networks for women candidates (Orji et al. 2018).

In order to combat violence against women in politics, it is necessary to enact special legislation that serves as a tool against women's abuse during the political process. Such legislation should empower poll workers to monitor and report violence against women during voting, establish an emergency telephone system for women candidates and voters to call if they experience threats, and create a tracking system to monitor police response to calls (USAID 2016).

The government should create funding initiatives to promote women's participation in political parties. These initiatives can take the form of seminars, training, and networks for female politicians. This will enable women to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to participate effectively in the political process.

Candidate quotas should also be legally introduced either at the selection or election stage. The number of reserved seats should be made available for women, and voluntary party quotas should be encouraged. Quotas will enhance an efficient increase in the number of women participating in political processes. Relevant stakeholders such as the Independent National Electoral Commission and political parties should ensure adherence to these quotas.

Tracking women's representation is also necessary to have data on the number of women actively involved in politics and to identify challenges and successes. It will also help in monitoring the effectiveness of policies and initiatives designed to promote women's participation in politics.

In addition, civil society programs should be established to improve women's chances of election by bringing together female aspirants to discuss strategies, network, provide training, and engage in research and advocacy. Existing civil society programs should also be encouraged by political parties and the government to do more (Working Together for 2019, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the numerous obstacles and challenges that hinder women's active participation in politics in Nigeria. Despite possessing constitutional rights to engage in politics, cultural beliefs continue to act as a significant barrier for women. To effectively tackle this issue, a multifaceted approach is recommended, encompassing societal transformation, educational and career opportunities, legislative reform, and the implementation of inclusive policies within political parties.

The urgent need to address the underrepresentation of women in Nigeria's political landscape is evident. Despite some efforts by political parties to encourage women's political involvement, such as waiving nomination form costs, the impact has been limited. Women face a range of challenges that impede their political participation, including economic constraints, gender-based hate speech and violence, fear of the unknown, lack of support from family members, financial limitations, inadequate media coverage, constitutional restrictions, lack of support from fellow women, gender discrimination by political parties, and an unfavorable political environment.

The current composition of the National Assembly, with only 21 female members out of 469, highlights the severity of the problem. Similar imbalances are observed in state assemblies, with only 45 women out of 990 members. Previous assemblies have shown minimal progress in female representation, with as little as 3.3 percent in the 1999-2003 period and 5.8 percent in the 2003-2007 period. The recent 2023 elections further underscore the failure to address this gender imbalance, as only a small number of female candidates were successful in securing seats in the Senate and the House of Representatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is clear that Nigeria's political parties have not done enough to promote women's participation in politics. Thus, political parties have a responsibility to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for women to encourage their active participation in politics. Parties should set up convenient and friendly meeting times and places for women to attend party meetings, remove any barriers that might prevent women from participating in politics, and develop gender-sensitive training programs to build women's confidence, skills, and knowledge needed to run successful political campaigns. Mentoring programs can also be implemented to offer guidance and support to potential women candidates, which can help them to navigate the political landscape.

Political parties should also focus on promoting women to leadership positions in campaign management and ensure that women are given additional media exposure during campaigns. Internal party quotas can be a powerful tool to encourage women's participation in politics, and parties should consider setting quotas for women's representation in leadership positions, candidate selection, and decision-making bodies. Targets should be set for the participation of women during party conventions, and political parties can work with civil society organizations to oversee the implementation of quotas and hold parties accountable for meeting their targets.

Finally, training programs should be made available to women candidates on essential skills such as fundraising and media relations. By offering these resources, political parties can help to level the playing field and give women the tools they need to succeed in politics. In conclusion, political parties have a vital role to play in promoting gender equality in politics and should take concrete steps to encourage women's active participation. By doing so, Nigeria can achieve the recommended benchmarks for women's political representation and enhance its democratic governance.

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ZASTUPLJENOST ŽENA: PROCJENA POLITIKA NIGERIJSKIH POLITIČKIH STRANAKA USMJERENIH NA ŽENE

Sažetak:

Ovaj članak ispituje djelotvornost različitih politika i strategija usmjerenih na promoviranje učešća žena u politici u Nigeriji, koje provode grupe za zagovaranje, međunarodne organizacije, političke stranke i nigerijska Vlada. Uprkos zakonskom pravu žena da se bave politikom i upravljanjem, kulturna uvjerenja su ometala njihovo aktivno učešće, što je dovelo do neadekvatne zastupljenosti žena u politici. Koristeći liberalnu feminističku teoriju studija procjenjuje odgovore žena na ove inicijative, izazove sa kojima se susreću u njihovoj provedbi i način na koji političke stranke mogu poboljšati svoju učinkovitost. Članak sugerira da je reforma zakonodavstva neophodna kako bi se ženama omogućilo da ostvare ravnopravan status sa muškarcima u društvu, što će povećati učešće žena u politici. Nadalje, članak tvrdi da nigerijske političke stranke nisu učinile dovoljno da podstaknu učešće žena u politici. Stoga bi političke stranke trebale uspostaviti gostoljubivo i inkluzivno okruženje koje zadovoljava potrebe žena. Da bi se to postiglo, političke stranke treba da organiziraju stranačke sastanke u vrijeme i na mjestima koja su pogodna i pristupačna za žene, eliminišu prepreke koje ometaju učešće žena u politici, razviju rodno osjetljive programe obuke kako bi poboljšali samopouzdanje i vještine žena te uspostave programe mentorisanja za podršku potencijalnim kandidatkinjama u navigiranju političkim krajolikom.

Ključne riječi: rod; rodna ravnopravnost; liberalni feminizam; političko učešće; politička stranka

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