




Chapter Six

The Gender Equality Bill, Political Chauvinism and the Quality of Women's Representation in Nigerian Politics

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Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's largest economy and population, ranks amongst the lowest in development indexes, with a persistent gender gap in political representation. Considering the under-representation of women in Nigeria, evident across the three arms of government, this chapter assesses women's representation along with political chauvinism and the Gender Equality Bills (GEBs) introduced in 2021. The low participation or representation of women in politics not only contradicts accepted principles of equality of rights, based on the principles of states being 'self-determined units' or those of democracy

and state sovereignty, but undermines the quality of democracy and legitimacy of a political system (Goyal, 2023).

Nigeria has traversed a complex path marked by political upheavals, economic fluctuations, and social transformations since her independence in 1960. Within this combustible mix, women's action and inaction in politics has been significant, accounting for the numerous scholarly debates on increasing women's participation and advocacies for gender equality bills as a recourse (Jiang et al., 2023). Constituting 49.95% out of 206 million, women account for a significant portion of the Nigerian population. Despite their numbers and considerable strides, they have continued to record low participation in politics, an enduring trend that reflects a gender-blind approach of successive administrations in Nigeria.

Since Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999, after 29 years of military reign, women's inclusion in politics has gradually improved, but not significant enough to alter the present status quo of under-representation and its impact of marginalisation on women's lives and livelihood. Essentially, low women's political participation in Nigeria perpetuates adverse conditions that limit women's ability to influence policy and advocate for gender-sensitive reforms (Nosiri et al., 2022). Beginning with elective positions, Nigeria's female representation in parliament is lowest in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (PLAC, 2024). From 1999 to the last general elections in 2023, women in elective and appointive positions remained less than 10%. In the 1999 general elections, only three women out of 109 seats were elected to the Senate, and 12 women out of 360 seats were elected to the House of Representatives. At the state level, the number of women in the State Houses of Assembly was also low, with only about 12 women out of 990 members nationwide. Women's participation at the local government level was even more minimal, with very few women elected to local councils.

Over the subsequent election years, there were incremental increases in women's representation, but progress has been slow. For instance, in the 2003 elections, the number of women

in the Senate increased to 4, while the House of Representatives saw a slight rise to 21 women. By 2015, there were 7 women in the Senate and 22 in the House of Representatives. Despite these gains, women's representation still falls short of gender parity. State and local levels have seen similar trends, with some states making more significant strides than others. Though continuous efforts to enhance women's political participation are increasing, driven by advocacy from women's rights organisations and supportive policies, the pace is, however, slow when compared to the wide gender gap.

As of the last general elections in 2023, women hold less than 7% of the seats in the National Assembly, a figure notably lower than the regional and global averages of 23.4% for Africa and 15% for West Africa. Hence, women are occupying only 3% of seats in the Senate and 4% in the House of Representatives. This signifies that women's representation dropped to 2.7% and 4.7% in the Senate and House of Representatives, respectively (PLAC, 2024). Within the judiciary's ranks, the representation of women is starkly limited. Out of 17 Justices in the Supreme Court, only 5 are women. Similarly, women constitute just 22 out of 84 judges in the Court of Appeal and only 26 out of 74 judges in the Federal High Courts (Oyekanmi, 2021). At the national level, there are only 7 women out of the 39 appointed Federal ministers. In contrast, at the State level, no woman has emerged as governor through elections, and at the local government level, less than 10% of councillors are women (See Table 1 and Figure 1).

Within the educational system, the literacy rate for females within the 15 to 24 age range is approximately 59%, while the rate for males in the same age group is 70% (World Bank, 2024). Also, only about 52% of adult females (15 years and older) are literate, compared to roughly 71% of adult males (World Population Review, 2024). Sadly, Nigeria has one of the highest rates of out-of-school children (5 to 14 years) in the world (20 million), with girls constituting a sizeable percentage of that number (Alabi, 2022). The situation in the northern part of the country is even worse, where at least, one in three children, mostly girls, are out of school (UKFIET, 2023).

Table 1: Female Representation in Selected Elective and Appointive Positions (1999–2023)

Year	1999		2003		2007		2011		2015		2019		2023	
	Seat	Women	Seat	Women	Seat	Women	Seat	Women	Seat	Women	Seat	Women	Seat	Women
President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Vice President	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Senate	109	3 (2.8%)	109	3 (2.27%)	109	9 (8.26%)	109	7 (6.4%)	109	7 (6.4%)	109	8 (7.3%)	109	3 (2.7%)
House of Reps.	360	12 (3.3%)	360	21 (5.83%)	360	25 (6.98%)	360	26 (7.2%)	360	22 (6.11%)	360	13 (3.6%)	360	17 (4.7%)
Governor	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0
Deputy Governor	36	1	36	2	36	6	36	1	36	-	36	4	36	8
State Houses of Assembly	990	24 (2.4%)	990	38 (3.84%)	990	54 (5.45%)	990	68 (6.9%)	990	-	990	44 (4.41%)	990	48 (4.85%)
Ministers	47	9 (19.1%)	33	5 (15.1%)	39	7 (17.9%)	41	13 (31.7%)	36	6 (16.6%)	44	7 (15.9%)	28	7 (25%)

Source: Authors' Compilation

Number of Men and Women in the Federal Legislature, Executive and Judiciary, 2023

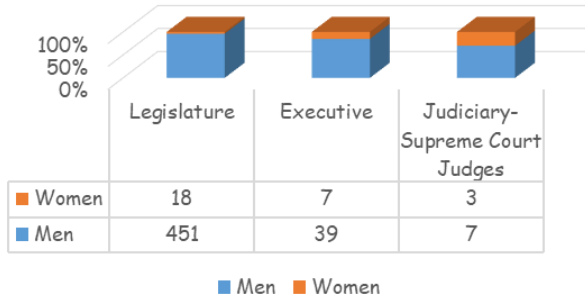


Figure 1: Number of Men and Women in the Federal Legislature, Executive and Judiciary, 2023. Source: Dataphyte, 2024

With a higher illiteracy rate compared to men, women are more vulnerable to girl-child marriage and a higher rate of gender-based violence. Accounting for 40% of all child brides in the region, Nigeria has the highest number of child brides in Africa, with over 22 million girls and women married off as youngsters and 44% of girls becoming married before reaching 18 years old (UNICEF, 2018). Nigeria accounts for the third highest number of women and girls worldwide who have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM), with high prevalence amongst girls between ages 0 to 14. Generally, 86% of females in Nigeria were cut before age 5, while 8% were cut between ages 5 and 14 (UNICEF, 2022).

The situation is no different in healthcare, where for every 100,000 live births, there are about 512 maternal fatalities. In addition, the adolescent birth rate is high, with about 106 births per 1,000 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 (World Bank, 2024). Consequently, the under-five mortality rate (U5MR) is 102 per 1,000 live births, a notable figure still far from the SDG target of 25 per 1,000 live births. One third of these deaths (34 per 1,000 live births) occur within the first 28 days of life (UNICEF, 2022).

The score card for women in economic participation is equally low. According to the World Bank as at 2020, women earn approximately 77% of what men earn for similar work, reflecting a significant wage gap. More so, only 52.2% of the working-age female population is actively participating in the labour force, compared to 65.9% for males for 2023. Data compiled between 2016 and 2024 on the share of female business owners stood at 34% compared to male business owners at 66% for Nigeria, which shows that women continue to face systemic barriers (World Bank, 2024). This, as the National Bureau of Statistics (2023) avers, is factored by occupational segregation and fewer opportunities for advancement, even when women own about 40% of SMEs (small and medium enterprises) in the country.

Hence, corroborating Álvarez et al.'s (2023) assertion, perspectives on gender extend beyond addressing women's issues, as it also provides a framework for understanding the organisation of society across various spheres like education, health and socio-economic sectors from a fresh perspective.

To this end, qualitative data were gathered through secondary sources. These data were analysed using content and discourse analysis.

The Gender Equality Bill

The Gender Equality Bill, formally known as the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, is a legislative proposal that has undergone multiple readings and rejections over the past several years. It was first introduced into Nigeria's political lexicon in 2006, under the National Gender Policy of 2006, which laid the groundwork for subsequent legislative efforts to formalise gender equality. Following efforts to achieve the 2015 Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 in Nigeria, the Bill resurfaced in 2010, particularly emphasising improving gender parity as a key development goal. However, despite the ambitious goals, the Bill faced significant challenges in the legislative process. The Bill was promoted by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, with the

backing of numerous regional and global organisations. The goal of the Bill was to domesticate international treaties and conventions that focused on gender, specifically the African Union protocol on women's rights in Africa and the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The Bill was introduced in the Nigerian Senate for the first time in March 2016 by Senator Biodun Olujimi, and a vote was held to decide whether or not it should be approved and become law. After deliberations, the Bill was rejected on 15 March 2016, on the basis that it contained a number of provisions that were incompatible with the religious and cultural views of the majority of Nigerians, making it unfit to become law (Kazeem, 2016). The Bill was again introduced in September 2016, and was rejected for the second time. Those opposed to it claimed that it went against Nigerian tradition and Islamic beliefs, especially Muslim Senators from the North (Payton, 2016).

Five years later, Senator Olujimi revived the Bill in March 2021 and presented it. However, the Bill was not successful, giving similar defences of cultural and religious values.

In December 2022, the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill was reintroduced in the Nigerian Senate. This time, the scope of this version of the Bill was broadened regarding other general gender-related concerns, such as discrimination and gender-based violence. This reintroduction reflected a holistic approach to the urgent concerns and was intended to be in line with local and international advocacy efforts for gender equality and women's rights.

Fortunately, the Bill made it to its second reading in the Senate on 31 May 2023. This accomplishment was a major advancement showing that, in spite of earlier obstacles, some legislators are committed to advancing gender equality. Consequently, the debate on the Bill shifted more towards how gender legal frameworks could guarantee equal gender opportunities in work, education as well as protecting people from gender-based violence.

Although the Bill eventually passed the second reading at the Senate, it is yet to pass the committee stage, where it will be thoroughly examined before a final vote and a third reading. If approved, it will go to the House of Representatives for ratification before ending up with the President. In any case, the advancement of the Bill is indicative of the growing awareness of the need to combat gender discrimination and advance equitable opportunities for all Nigerians as a way of solidifying democracy.

Implications of the GEB on Women's Quality Representation

Despite facing significant obstacles, primarily from sociocultural and religious factors, the upcoming months into the new political dispensation of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, will be instructive as the Gender Equality Bill undergoes further scrutiny and debate in the legislative process.

Essentially, the proposed legislation seeks to implement Section 42 of the Nigerian Constitution, which prohibits discrimination on various grounds, including gender. It addresses issues such as land ownership, inheritance rights, education, employment, and the rising tide of gender-based violence.

Specifically, the Bill has five propositions:

1. *Special Seats for Women*

This sought to amend Sections 48, 49, 71, 77 and 117 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) to create special seats for women in the Senate, House of Representatives, and State Houses of Assembly as a temporary special measure aimed at enhancing and encouraging women's participation and representation in politics.

Key Provisions of Sections 48, 49, 71, 77 and 117 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended)

- Section 48: This section specifies the composition of the Senate, the upper house of the National Assembly. It outlines the representation from each state and the Federal Capital Territory, ensuring equal representation across the states.
- Section 49: This section details the composition of the House of Representatives, the lower house of the National Assembly. It provides the basis for the number of representatives, which the population of each state and the Federal Capital Territory determines.
- Section 71: This section grants the National Assembly the power to establish constituencies. It describes how the boundaries of these constituencies should be determined, ensuring fair and adequate representation of the population.
- Section 77: This section outlines the electoral process for members of the National Assembly. It mandates that elections should be conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and should follow the principles of democratic elections.
- Section 117: This section pertains to the election of members to the House of Assembly of each state. It specifies that these elections should be conducted following the regulations set forth by the INEC.

Thus, the creation of special seats for women through a possible amendment of these sections of the 1999 Constitution is to collectively ensure a fair, representative, and democratic process for the election of legislative members in Nigeria. This is premised on the fact that under-representation affects the formulation and implementation of policies that address women's needs and priorities, as highlighted above. The Bill aims to rectify this by advocating for affirmative action policies that would ensure a minimum quota for women in political positions.

2. *Expansion of the Scope of Citizenship by Registration*

This Bill seeks to improve Section 26 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) to allow the foreign male spouses of Nigerian women to acquire citizenship by registration. Presently, the

key provision of this section only allows foreign female spouses to Nigerian males to **obtain citizenship by registration**. In effect, any woman who is or has been married to a citizen of Nigeria can apply for registration as a Nigerian citizen. This change would promote quality representation of women by ensuring that Nigerian women and men have the same rights to confer citizenship on their foreign spouses. Additionally, it would strengthen family unity and stability, as spouses would no longer face legal and bureaucratic hurdles based on gender. Ensuring their equal rights and status within the legal framework empowers more women to participate fully and confidently in civic and political spaces. Overall, this proposed Bill represents a significant step towards eliminating gender discrimination in Nigerian citizenship laws and fostering a more inclusive society.

3. *Affirmative Action for Women in Political Party Administration*

This sought to amend Section 223 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) to provide for affirmative action in favour of women in political party administration by prescribing that at least 35% of party executives are women. This amendment seeks to address the gender imbalance in political leadership roles and ensure that women's voices and perspectives are adequately represented in the decision-making processes within political parties. By guaranteeing a minimum level of female representation in party leadership, the amendment would ensure that women's interests and issues are more likely to be considered and prioritised in party agendas and policies.

4. *Indigeneship Rights*

It seeks to amend Sections 31 and 318 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) to prescribe the criteria for qualification to become an indigene of a state in Nigeria. It prescribed that a woman married to an indigen of a state different from her state of origin for at least five years should be deemed to be an indigen of that state and therefore is entitled to all rights and privileges such as employment, appointment or election into any political or public office. Sections 31 and 318 of the

1999 Constitution address the qualifications and criteria for citizenship and indigeneship but lack specific provisions regarding the status of women married across state lines. This amendment is a significant legal development, providing a clear and equitable pathway for women to gain indigeneship status through marriage. This provision proposes that married women are not disadvantaged by their marital status and can fully integrate into their spouses' communities. Access to state-specific rights and privileges, such as employment and public office, promotes women's social and economic integration into their new communities. This enhances their ability to contribute to local governance and development, reflecting their unique perspectives and needs. When vying for political office, many women have had conflicts of interest about their state of origin and marriage of origin. For instance, the political career of Aisha Alhassan, popularly known as Mama Taraba, who is originally from Kaduna state but married to a man in Taraba state, was complicated by the perception that, as a woman married in Taraba, she may not fully represent the indigeneity required for political leadership in the state.

5. *Affirmative Action*

This sought to amend Section 147 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) to ensure the appointment of not less than 10% of women as Ministers and Commissioners in the Federal and State Executive Council to guarantee the inclusion of women in governance. Section 147 of the 1999 Constitution currently outlines the process for appointing Ministers and Commissioners but does not specify gender quotas. The proposed amendment seeks to rectify this by explicitly requiring a minimum representation of women in these key executive positions. By embedding this requirement in the Constitution, the amendment provides a strong legal framework for advancing gender equality in Nigeria's political landscape. Women in executive positions are better positioned to advocate for and implement policies that promote gender equality and women's rights. Their involvement can lead to the development of more gender-sensitive policies, addressing issues such as maternal

health, education for girls, and protection against gender-based violence.

In other words, the implications of the proposed GEB on ensuring quality representation from women hinges on four key areas. They include ensuring equal opportunities for men and women in all spheres of life; eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and girls; promoting gender mainstreaming in policymaking and implementation; and enhancing the participation of women in political and public life

These implications are a given, because democracy is characterised by the inclusion and participation of all citizens. Therefore, gender equality and the quality of its representation transcend women or men. The exclusion of women from political and economic processes limits the diversity of perspectives and solutions available to address our national challenges.

Conceptualising Political Chauvinism and the GEB

The phenomenon of political chauvinism, which expresses itself in status subordination and marginalisation, has become common within Nigerian politics. Women's participation in Nigerian politics has been attributed to systemic problems and cultural background, which creates a male chauvinistic environment characterised by an adverse disposition to leadership in the community, political arena, religion, or any other public activity. Political and social theories explore different dimensions of chauvinism, often tracing the term to nationalism and patriotism (Gustavsson & Stendahl, 2020). Political chauvinism is a gendered ideology with societal expectations, as well as a cultural construct, stipulating subordinate status for women and citizens that identify with women's causes (Rudnyckj & Whittington, 2020).

Political chauvinism extends sexism out of the private confines into the public spectrum by attacking women's gains in politics. It targets women, political parties, and feminist organisations that decide to challenge the segregation of competencies in political life (Čičkarić, 2024). Although present in societies and homogenised within conservative and religious

groups that oppose sexual liberation, political chauvinism seeks not only to reduce current women's political role but also to prevent public access for women or men collaborating with feminist causes.

Within the context of Nigeria's political landscape, political chauvinism has influenced women's political participation, particularly concerning the formulation and implementation of the GEB. These chauvinistic tendencies create three main barriers that limit the quality of women's representation in Nigeria. They include:

1. Cultural and Religious Practices

Nigeria's patriarchal society and religiously diverse landscape often view politics as a male domain, discouraging women from aspiring to political roles and public leadership. According to the cultural determinism theory, culture is critical in shaping a country's gender roles and development (Oyekanmi & Pogoson, 2021; Gambaro et al., 2023). The foundation of cultural and religious belief in Nigeria permeates the subjugation of women across all spheres of society, including politics. Hence, Nigeria is based on traditional beliefs and social values, which dictate that women should prioritise domestic responsibilities over public life. These societal expectations create significant psychological barriers for women who wish to enter politics, making it difficult for them to gain support from their families and communities (Ajibade et al., 2021).

This is the case with the GEB, which passed a second reading at the Nigerian Senate after numerous rejections since 2016. Amongst the reasons for its rejection by most members of the parliament were their notion of religious injunctions of the holy books on women and leadership and the domination of men, who make up over 90% of the parliament. Even though some technical issues, such as the use of 'equality' in the Bill instead of 'equity', which most of the legislators preferred, as contained in the Bill, were raised, deep-rooted cultural and traditional norms continually inhibited the passage of the Bill. The opposition against the Bill continues to manifest

in various forms, such as lobbying against the Bill, spreading misinformation, and employing political tactics to delay or block its passage. For instance, in 2019, Mr Yusuf and Mr Wamakko, two of the Senators (Taraba Central Senatorial and Sokoto North Senatorial districts), opposed the Bill, saying that its provisions were against the socio-cultural practice of Islam. They argued further that by equating opportunities for women and men, the Bill infringes on the provisions of the Quran and the Bible. With emphasis on removing the word “equal” (Iroanusi, 2021), they suggested that a Bill bearing the Gender Equity Bill would be better accepted.

The political opposition to the GEB amongst the Nigerian political class and others stems from misperceptions of the provisions of the Bill as well as its intention. Arguments against the Bill, for the most part, tend to rest on the fundamental misunderstanding or ignorance of its provisions. Another male senator claimed that ‘we should not give women too much opportunity. They will come here, and one day you will find all these women in this chamber, and they will mess up’ (Ette & Akpan-Obong, 2023). Furthermore, the majority of the presentations from policymakers and civil society alike, as well as media commentaries and editorials from 2016, tended to focus almost exclusively on the controversial provision of the Bill calling for a 35% affirmative action for women. While some commentators did not explicitly query the necessity of affirmative action in Nigeria, practically all of them took issue with the exclusive nature of the affirmative action that is called for in the GEB.

Thus, political chauvinism has manifested through cultural, social and religious practices significantly hampering the passage of the Gender Equality Bill, despite its propensity to enhance the quality of women’s representation. Intuitively, considering that most Nigerian parliamentarians are products of a patriarchal society where men traditionally hold positions of power and authority, these male-dominated leadership structures extend to political institutions, where male parliamentarians may view gender equality bills as a threat to their established dominance.

Similarly, the power structures within the Nigerian parliament further impede the passage of the GEB. In effect, assenting to any bill requires broad political support, which is a simple majority of the Senators present and voting or a quorum of at least one-third of the entire membership of the Senate. Until 2021, the GEB did not scale through the second reading and is yet to pass through the third reading, implying the low support for a bill that will strengthen the quality of women's representation in politics and Nigeria's development in the long run. Therefore, cultural and religious beliefs manifested through political chauvinism within Nigerian society created substantial barriers to legislative progress on gender equality.

2. Economic Considerations

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty in Nigeria, accounting for over 60% of the poorest individuals in Nigeria, with approximately 52 million women living in extreme poverty (Jerumeh, 2024). Compared to men, they are economically disadvantaged, thereby enabling political chauvinism as an enduring weapon to limit their access to quality life and livelihood. Often exacerbated by systemic issues such as unequal pay and the high prevalence of informal employment, these economic constraints further hamper not only their participation in politics but also their quality. Women's economic marginalisation creates an imbalance in the power structure, with men dominating the financial resources and influencing the decision-making processes. For instance, propositions 2 and 4 of the GEB, respectively ([Expansion of the Scope of Citizenship by Registration and Indigeneship Rights](#)) seek to address the limits to women's economic power, which restricts their ability to own property, access financial resources, and fully participate in economic activities and opportunities, in regions where they are not considered indigenes.

As highlighted in the introductory section of this chapter, women's access to education, quality health, etc., is poor compared to their male counterparts. Consequently, their political agency is restricted, given that they have fewer resources to engage in political activities and effect substantial

change actively. In other words, this results in fewer women holding influential positions, which translates to lower political influence, representation and impact on women.

By extension, the economic limitations which manifest in poverty and economic dependence exacerbate the male chauvinist political system by reinforcing traditional gender roles and norms. Thus, women's voices are often excluded from political debates and decision-making bodies, reinforcing male-dominated governance structures.

3. Political Parties

Political parties, which are the vehicle of democracy, have been a key enabler of political chauvinism, significantly affecting the quality of women's political representation in Nigeria. Even though women have been very active in voting, constituting about 51% of the voters in the last general elections, they continue to be under-represented in elective and appointive positions. Proposition three of the GEB, seeking for affirmative action of at least 35% of party executives for women in political party administration seeks to address this, given the present imbalance of gender candidacy within political parties.

Examining the number of female parliamentarians, who must navigate their political parties' internal processes to emerge, highlights the disparities in women's representation within these parties. Using the 2019 election, Nigeria had the lowest women's representation in upper and lower chambers across several African countries, despite women's high voting turn out (Dan-Azumi & Asan, 2021), while between 1999 and 2024 the cumulative percentage of women in parliament compared to men is 6% to 94%

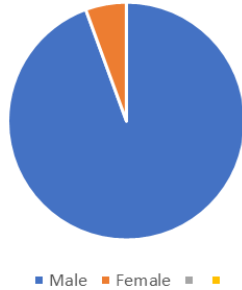
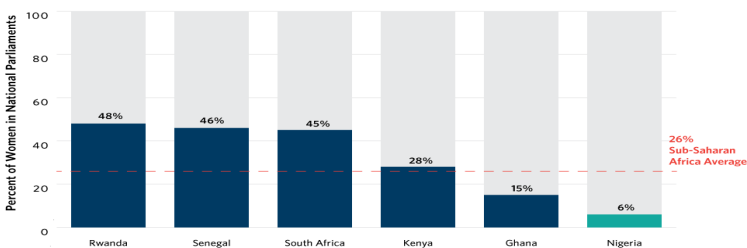


Figure 2: Percentage of Male and Female Parliamentarians Between 1999 and 2024. Source: Author’s conceptualisation.

Nigeria’s political arena is heavily dominated by men, with patriarchal attitudes and discriminatory practices limiting quality participation from women. Political parties and structures often marginalise women, providing them with fewer opportunities to contest for leadership positions and often relegating them to less influential roles. This political marginalisation is not only reflected in the low number of women holding elected offices but also in the poor performances of some of the few women holding office, who seek to remain loyal to their male benefactors who brought them into office.

Figure 1. Women’s Representation in National Parliaments in Select African Countries



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), 2023.

Note: Data for Nigeria is based on the 2019 elections results.

Figure 3: Women’s Representation in National Parliaments in Selected African Countries

The political party system in Nigeria has been male-dominated, with institutions shaped to promote and sustain their dominance. As far back as the 1950s, when independent political parties were formed, the three major parties, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), and the Action Group (AG), were created without structural consideration for women. Though some women like Margaret Ekpo, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, and Mrs Awolowo. Etc. demonstrated quality women's representation, still felt to this day, women were generally under-represented in political activities during this period because of societal norms and restrictions. This ongoing trend of political chauvinism against women lingered into the 2023 elections, highlighting the continued challenge of achieving gender parity in political representation. In the 2023 elections, there were 15,307 candidates contending for various political positions across the 18 registered political parties. However, women accounted for only 9.8% of the total number of candidates, with only a meagre 5.2% of the total women who contested winning their election (Lemo, 2023).

Fundamentally, the reality of women's political representation negates the constitution and manifests guiding political parties and the Independent National Electoral Body (INEC) since 1999. This is stipulated in Articles 1 and 2 of INEC's regulations on political party respectively, stating thus: "A political party seeking to participate in any election organised by the commission (INEC) must conduct primaries, wherein all eligible members of the party must be given equal opportunity to participate in the primaries of the party for the purpose of selecting candidates for elective positions" (INEC, 2022).

"Political parties must not create rules or impose conditions or set high expression of interest or nomination fee that could exclude aspirants on the basis of sex, religion, ethnicity, circumstance of birth or wealth" (INEC, 2022). In like manner, the constitution of the two most popular parties in Nigeria, the All Progressives Congress (APC), and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), states in sum, that regulations and guidelines of the party should consider and uphold the

principles of inclusivity, without prejudice to federal character, gender balance, geopolitical diversity, and rotation of offices to ensure a balanced (INEC, 2014).

While most of these political parties are explicit with the theory of inclusivity for all persons regardless of gender, religion, tribe etc., their activities and actions suggest otherwise. In most cases, aspiring to leadership positions and securing the party ticket goes beyond purchasing nomination forms to the patronage system and godfatherism politics, which may be unfavourable to most women. This political chauvinism accounted largely for the low turnout of women contesting at the presidential level in the 2023 general elections, where there was only one female presidential candidate and no female vice-presidential candidate from the 18 registered political parties. At the governorship level, only 25 out of the 419 governorship candidates were women (Alabi, 2022). For the Federal House of Representatives, there were only 286 women out of 3,107 candidates, while at the State Houses of Assembly only 1,046 out of 10,225 were women (Alabi, 2022) (see Figures 4,5,6).

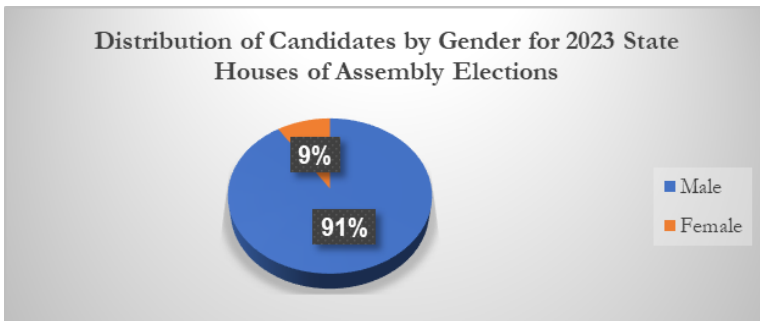


Figure 4: Distribution of Candidates by Gender for 2023 State Houses of Assembly Elections. Source: Author's compilation from INEC data (2023)

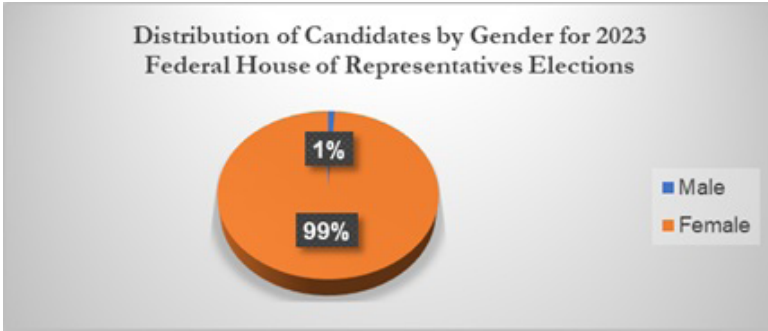


Figure 5: Distribution of Candidates by Gender for 2023 Federal House of Representatives Elections. Source: Author’s compilation from INEC data (2023)

With respect to the GEB, the high-performing countries as shown in Figure 3, reveal the striking intervention of a quota system effective from the party level. Though the quota system may be legislated or voluntary, it however diffuses political chauvinism manifested through male dominance. For instance, in South Africa and Senegal, the electoral law requires that political parties guarantee that women make up 50% of their candidate lists for subnational elections (Nkereuwem, 2023).

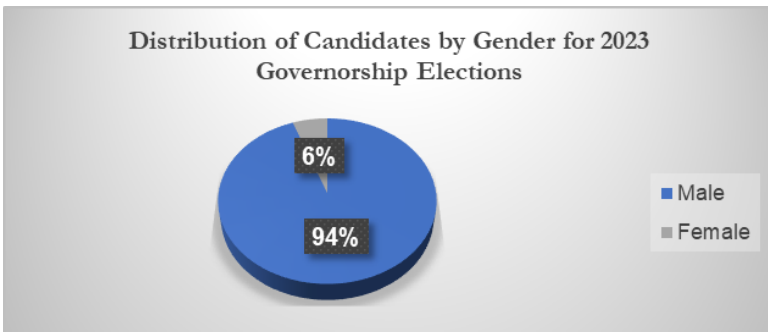


Figure 6: Distribution of Candidates by Gender for 2023 Governorship Elections. Author’s compilation from INEC data (2023). Source: Author’s compilation from INEC data (2023)

In addition, the majority of women who ran for office did so on the platforms of somewhat smaller, and parties established more recently. The larger and older parties like the PDP and the APC were less accommodating to female aspirants, thereby justifying the statistics of over 90% of female candidates vying under the platform of smaller parties. Consequently, as Nkereuwem (2023) opines, four factors; conservative norms and culture, competitive differences between executive and legislative offices, combined effect of novice candidature (high number of political newcomers) and low persistence (staying power) of women candidates who lose elections, including political party gatekeeping, largely accounts for more women candidates dropping out or being eliminated from the race during party primaries.

These political chauvinist traits within political parties in Nigeria solidify male-dominated structures with leadership patterns that favour men. The effect of these is the incessant discrimination that women face within these parties, receiving fewer opportunities to run for office or assume leadership positions that can effect quality representation.

Conclusion

This chapter investigated the GEB from the prism of women's quality representation and political chauvinism in Nigeria. Despite its noble objectives, the GEB has faced significant resistance. Cultural and religious arguments are often cited to oppose the Bill, with some critics claiming that it contravenes traditional values and religious teachings. This resistance highlights the deep-seated patriarchal norms that continue to shape societal attitudes towards gender roles in Nigeria.

Political chauvinism since the independence government in Nigeria, strengthened by culture and religion, has contributed in no small measure to the failure of the GEB in enhancing the quality of women's representation. Limited awareness and understanding of the importance and implications of gender equality legislation creates room for misconceptions about gender equality, leading to resistance or apathy towards the

Bill amongst policymakers, legislators, and the general public. Political chauvinism and the absence of legal equality are amongst many claims voiced by gender advocates to explain women's low representation in politics worldwide. This seems to not be openly recognised by Nigerian decision-makers, as evidenced by the lack of support for the Gender Equality Bill. What seems to attract attention in the debate are frivolous explanations such as political party ideology structured along patriarchy, semantics, and women's performance and strategic behaviour in political competitions. Only minimal attention is devoted to issues of cultural change, women's experience in political institutions, the influence of social movements, and other possible mechanisms of change that can contribute to closing the gender gap.

The chapter highlights cultural and religious beliefs, economic consideration and political party processes as the main channels that political chauvinism has manifested in hampering women's quality representation. Though the Bill has merits in furthering women's representation effectively, these three channels have remained potent in stifling women's vibrancy in politics. Furthermore, considering that political will is critical for the Bill's passage and implementation, without the support of key political and religious actors and stakeholders, the Bill's provisions may remain a theoretical aspiration rather than a practical reality.

Hence, overcoming these barriers requires sustained advocacy, by addressing the underlying social and cultural norms that breed political chauvinism. It is recommended that regular dialogue with religious and traditional leaders on mitigating cultural and religious values over gender equality should be enhanced. In essence, demonstrating that gender equality aligns with the fundamental principles of justice, fairness, and human dignity can foster broader acceptance. This will help to accelerate the passage of the Bill and gradually eliminate political chauvinism. It is also important to raise public awareness about the benefits of gender equality and the provisions of the Bill not only enhance the quality representation of women but also advancing national development. These

advocacy campaigns should target urban and rural areas, making use of traditional and social media to reach diverse audiences.

Notable success stories like Rwanda (above 60%), Senegal (46%), South Africa, Namibia, and Mozambique (above 40%) where females occupy a significant percentage of parliamentary seats (Statista, 2023) with records of tangible levels of development should be highlighted to emphasise the importance of quality women's representation to national development.

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