

Chapter 3

The Endangered Species: Women's Participation in Politics and Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

A state's drive for socioeconomic and political development is contingent on how well it harnesses its available resources. One such resource is human capital which consists of the men and women in the state. The neglect or disregard of a particular group could prove counter-productive or serve as a drawback or hindrance to the development strides in the state. In Nigeria, women make up over 49% of the entire population; hence, non-involvement of women in decision-making and state-building amounts to a significant underutilisation of the human capital resource of the state. Nigeria has the least number of women parliamentarians in sub-Saharan Africa and is ranked 133rd worldwide for female political representation. Despite this, the few who participate in the governance process pass through some harrowing experiences. This chapter aims to examine the challenges of women's participation in politics in Nigeria. The qualitative research design was adopted to assess the level of women's representation in governance. Secondary data was provided to support the argument of the threat and the inherent dangers women in Nigeria encounter in the collective decision-making process. The chapter concludes by proffering possible solutions for protecting women to improve their political representation.

Keywords: Endangered, Politics, Representation. Violence, Women

Introduction

The 'Women Question' is one of the nagging issues in citizenship discourse, especially regarding gender distinction, which is encapsulated in the



discrimination against women in the affairs of the state or society. Situations where women are not accorded full and equal participation or opportunities to exploit their full potential and contribute their quota to state-building; rob society of the prospects of rapid social, economic, political and cultural development.

In exercising the fundamental human rights to participate in governance and politics, several barriers and obstacles, mostly society-based, stand in the way of women from being able to exercise such rights fully (Para-Mallam, 2015). In Africa, the issue of gender distinction is peculiar because of the cultural and traditional heritage that people (particularly men) still tenaciously hold on to as a tool for the deprivation and exclusion of the female gender. In Nigeria, the case is particularly problematic as women's representation in Nigerian governance and politics falls far below expectations when compared to women's representation in other countries in Africa and beyond.

According to Isike and Uzodike (2011), "women are in the majority in most countries, yet they have retained the minority status in the world be it socially, economically and politically." In Nigeria, women constitute over 49% of the entire population (Ogbonna, 2016). Nigeria has the lowest number of female lawmakers in sub-Saharan Africa and is ranked 133 in the world in terms of female political representation (Ogbonna, 2016). Of Africa's 54 countries, Nigeria ranks 54 and in terms of female representation, is the lowest with 5.4% (Okafor & Ileyemi, 2023). Together with the poor female representation in Nigeria is the trend of victimisation, humiliation, threat of political violence, to actual violence and possible assassination against women. For Isike and Uzodike (2011), marginalisation of women beyond the economic level is also carried through to the visible aspect of state politics, where their participation is restricted, and to some extent, non-existent.

The 'Women Question' in political representation in Nigeria is deeply entrenched in the historiography of the country. It however started to gain prominence in the political agenda of Nigeria in the latter part of the 1980s. The Federal Military Government of Gen. Ibrahim officially attempted to address this question (Abdullah, 1993). This was encapsulated in the framework instituted by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida, where reforms were introduced that appeared to give recognition to gender issues in the country. The Political Bureau that was set up to address the 'Women Question' was the first to propose the reservation of 5% of legislative seats to women at all levels of government (Abdullah, 1993). The government, however, rejected this recommendation, and since then, Nigeria has continued to experience a very low representation of women in politics and the governance process.

Dominant discourse on gender studies tend to focus on women's marginalisation, representation and under-representation in the politics and governance of the state (Chuku, 2009; Isike & Uzodike, 2011). Some other strands of literature have focused on violence against women (Ojigho, 2009), gender injustice (Uche, 2002) and the discriminatory practices that women encounter in society.

Although Nigeria has experienced uninterrupted democratic rule for over two decades, female political participation remains problematic. Even though the struggle for women's right to political participation resulted in the signing of several agreements on the rights of women to participate in the governance of their country (Kaniye, 2005) and the United Nations Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1954 (UN, 1954) as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979 (UN, 1979), women have not been able to measure up to the men in the development process in the country.

This chapter examines women's participation in Nigeria's politics and governance. It interrogates the inequalities resulting from women engaging in the socio-political process and the challenges that they face in the political space through subjugation, intimidation, humiliation, threats and violence. The study adopted the qualitative research design and used secondary data sources. Documented evidence was used to support the arguments of the threats and inherent dangers that women in Nigeria encounter in the exercise of their franchise in the collective decision-making process of the country. The chapter is organised as follows: After the introduction is a section that clarifies the basic concepts of the chapter. The third section examines the subjugation of women through masculinisation of the political space in Nigeria and the horizontal inequalities that exist between men and women in political representation. The fourth section examines the dangers that women in politics are exposed to in an attempt to engage the political process. The fifth section makes a case for women's representation in Nigeria. The chapter concludes by suggesting ways that women's representation in Nigeria can be improved.

Conceptual clarification

To avoid any form of ambiguity, some concepts which are key to this chapter are clarified and explained within the context that they were used.

Governance

Governance can be defined as the process through which power is deployed to achieve the noble end of the state. It is the manner in which power is exercised

in the management of a state's economic, social and human resources for development (Agwu, 2011). According to Ogundiya (2010), governance is the process of allocating resources through the instrumentality of the state for the attainment of public good. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines governance as the exercise of administrative, economic and political authority for managing the affairs of a country at all levels (UNDP, 1997).

In this chapter, women in governance and politics refers to the extent to which women take part in the collective decision-making process in the state; and the role they play in the exercise of power and authority in managing the resources of the state to bring about the common good for the citizens.

The endangered species

The phrase 'The Endangered Species' in the context of this chapter refers to female folk who suffer various forms of violence in the political process, that deepens their systematic and systemic elimination from actual political representation and decision-making processes. Such manipulative forms of violence endanger women and repel them from mainstream politics and representation. Apart from the fact that these repeated attacks and the concomitant effect on the emotions and psychology of women, it makes politics unattractive to them and diminishes their representation in the democratic process. This accounts for the reason why there seems to be a downward trend in women's representation in elective positions in general and the 2023 General Elections in particular. It is on this premise that the valid indicator is derived, to the effect in political representation and governance, women appear to be the endangered species. In other words, women are considered the endangered species because of the violent attacks they encounter in politics that creates trauma capable of reducing their interest and participation in politics.

Horizontal inequalities and women's subjugation in Nigeria

The cultural dispositions of many African states place women as a support system to men, particularly on the domestic front, and as such, they are seen as a second fiddle to men. This social construction has penetrated the social, economic and political fabric of society to the extent that a gender structure has emerged which tends to place men above women almost all the time. This is why Hassim (1993) contends that the pre-colonial African traditional culture is inherently oppressive of women, and they are cut-off from decision-making and defined out of mainstream politics.

The deprivation and discrimination against women resulting from uneven distribution or access to opportunities in the public space where men are privileged, give rise to horizontal inequality. Horizontal inequality as a concept draws attention to inequalities amongst groups as opposed to individuals or households that reflect vertical inequality (Onwuzuruigbo, 2011; Nnabuihe, 2019). Whereas vertical inequality focuses on distribution of income, horizontal inequality focuses on the distribution of opportunities. This horizontal inequality is what accounts for conflicts amongst groups in many countries of the world (Stewart, 2002; Langer, 2005; Onwuzuruigbo, 2011; Nnabuihe, 2019). In the case of gender distinction in Nigeria, the horizontal inequalities find expression in the discrimination against women and the uneven and/or unequal access to political power and resources. One idea used to sustain this practice of discrimination is what Loury (2015) referred to as collective reputation.

According to Loury (2015), collective reputation is an attempt to either treat or securitise a population or group of people by collectively categorising them as negative. For example, saying that all women or the place of women in society is in the home or kitchen. With this, it would be easy and convenient to deny them of position(s) or opportunities in the public space. This collective reputation has a way of sustaining horizontal inequality (Nnabuihe, 2019). In Nigeria, collective reputation forms part of politics. It is used as a form of stereotyping that aids or sustains certain practices particularly discriminating against women by classifying them as a second fiddle or as people who can only be seen but not heard. This stereotyping has given men an edge over women especially in the public space; consequently, projecting horizontal inequality even more.

Studies on horizontal inequalities have focused more on measuring inequality amongst ethnic, racial, religious, social and political groups that arise from deprivation, discrimination and denial of resources and/or access to state wealth, and how such inequalities have resulted in conflicts. Although the horizontal inequality that exists between men and women in society has not resulted in any physical or violent conflict, there is however, what can be referred to as a 'cold conflict' between men and women in the political settings of the state, where opposing ideas on political representation of women have conduced into subjugation of women in the Nigerian political space.

The rejection of the recommendation of the Political Bureau for the reservation of 5% of legislative seats to women at all levels of government (for which no particular reason was adduced) which was meant to address the disadvantaged position of women, tends to reverberate the quest for male dominance and further stretches the horizontal inequality between men and

women. The sustained dominance of men in the politics and governance of Nigeria gives the impression that the female gender is inferior to the male (Kaniye, 2005).

Statistically, in Nigeria, men have occupied a dominant position in the politics and governance of the country. For example, Chuku (2009) argues that women in politics and governance are subdued rather than are active in the drive for development and growth and in the visibility of governance in Nigeria. She opined that since the decolonisation process in Nigeria, women's representation in governance has largely been complementary. She further argued that the subjugation of women and the masculinisation of the public space in Nigeria have their root in colonialism; where the British imposition of the infamous indirect rule to govern the country was executed largely through male authorities, thus, formalising male institutions. From thence, the female subjugation grew with time into the post-independence era and continued to date. In the transition to independent Nigeria for example, the 1959 General Elections were heavily dominated by men. Although a few women in Southern Nigeria contested in the federal election, none of them was elected into office (Chuku, 2009).

The institutional framework for women's representation in the decision-making process in Nigeria is a half-way house from reality. In the administration of Muhammadu Buhari for instance, women made up only 16% of his cabinet (Okafor & Ileyemi, 2023). In contrast, Rwanda for example, has 49% female parliamentarians (Kaniye, 2005). In the drafting of the Constitutions of Rwanda and Uganda, women were part of the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC), unlike Nigeria, where the committee that drafted the 1999 Constitution was made up of 29 persons and none was a woman (Kaniye, 2005). Even the CDC for the transition to civil rule in 1975 that was composed of 50 persons did not have a single female representative (Chuku, 2009).

Between 1999 and 2003, out of a total of 11,881 electable positions nationwide, women occupied only 191 places, representing 1.6% (Kaniye, 2005). In parliament, out of 360 members of the House of Representatives, only 12 (3.3%) were women, while the Senate had just 2 women (1.8%) out of 109 senators (Women Right Watch, 2002). In the 8th and 9th Assemblies, that is, 2015 to 2019, and 2019 to 2023, the Senate had only 7 female senators (6.4%) while the House of Representatives had 22 female members (6.1%) in the 8th Assembly and just 11 female members (3.1%) in the 9th Assembly (Eke, 2022). This represents a marginal increase in female representation from the period when Nigeria's democracy was referred to as nascent.

At the state level, the trend is no different. For instance, no woman was elected in 15 out of Nigeria's 36 states Houses of Assembly (Kano, Abia, Katsina, Imo, Jigawa, Rivers, Osun, Niger, Borno, Kebbi, Bauchi, Gombe, Yobe, Sokoto and Zamfara) following the elections in March 2023 (PLAC, 2023). Between 1999 and 2003, there was only one female in the Kogi State House of Assembly; and none between 2003 and 2023 (Kolawole, 2004; Labaran, 2023). The implication is that for about two decades, women in Kogi State had no say in decisions and policies that affected their lives. Also, apart from Virginia Etiaba, who served as Governor momentarily for only three months following the controversial impeachment of the then Governor of Anambra State, Peter Obi, no other woman in Nigeria has ever been elected Governor (Udodiong, 2019). There is no gainsaying that the leadership of the State Houses of Assembly is mostly dominated by men.

In 2011, women made up 6.9% and 7.2% of the Houses of Assembly and Representatives respectively but by 2019, the figures reduced to 4.4% and 3.6% (Nimisire, 2022). In the presidential election of February 2023, only one woman in the entire country stood as candidate, while for the governorship election there was only one woman (Adamawa State) who stood as candidate in all the states that were due for elections (Jimoh, 2023). At the federal level, that is, the Presidency, the male dominance of the Chief Executive's position in Nigeria is usually upheld at the party level where women rarely hold strategic positions. But what is usually obtainable is that men occupy major party position in the decisions-making process.

Table 1 shows that there was a decrease in female representation in the Senate. Whereas the Senate in 2019 had 7 women Senators, the 2023 elections produced just 3 after the parliamentary polls that were held on 25 February. This represents a decline in numbers, and it reinforces the male dominance of the parliament in Nigeria.

The uneven distribution of political power and resources and the discriminatory practices against women in Nigerian politics contravenes the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Political Rights of Women. The Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill which was presented to the Senate was rejected twice. Apparently, the seven female Senators did not have the numerical strength to match the male Senators (Eke, 2022). This reinforces the issue of horizontal inequality and subjugation of women in public space in Nigeria.

Table 1: Women's Representation in Public Office from 1999-2023

Office	1999		2003		2007		2011		2015		2019		2023	
	Seat	Women (%)	Seat	Women (%)	Seat	Women (%)	Seat	Women (%)	Seat	Women (%)	Seat	Women (%)	Seat	Women (%)
President	1	0 (0.0%)	1	0 (0.0%)	1	0 (0.0%)	1	0 (0.0%)	1	0 (0.0%)	1	0 (0.0%)	1	0 (0.0%)
Senate	109	3 (2.8%)	109	4 (3.7%)	109	9 (8.3%)	109	7 (6.4%)	109	8 (7.3%)	109	7 (6.4%)	109	3 (2.7%)
House of Representatives	360	7 (1.9%)	360	21 (5.8%)	360	27 (7.5%)	360	25 (6.9%)	360	22 (6.1%)	360	11 (3.1%)	360	14 (3.8%)
Governor	36	0 (0.0%)	36	0 (0.0%)	36	0 (0.0%)	36	0 (0.0%)	36	0 (0.0%)	36	0 (0.0%)	36	0 (0.0%)
State House of Assembly	990	24 (2.4%)	990	40 (3.9%)	990	57 (5.8%)	990	68 (6.9%)	990	ND	993	45 (4.5%)	993	48 (4.8%)
LGA Chairperson	710	13 (1.8%)	774	15 (1.9%)	740	27 (3.6%)	740	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
LGA Councillors	6368	69 (1.1%)	6368	267 (4.2%)	6368	235 (3.7%)	6368	ND	6368	ND	6368	ND	6368	ND

Source: Adopted from Okonkwo (2016)

ND: Data Unavailable

The Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010) aims at giving effect to certain provisions of the 1999 Constitution (as amended). In the event that it becomes a law, it would give effect to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. The Bill is meant to promote equality, development and advancement of all persons, especially young women, through the provision of special measures that would eliminate discrimination and increase women's participation in the public and private spheres (Eke, 2022). Besides this, the Bill is also meant to prohibit all forms of violence against women in public and private places and eradicate harmful socio-cultural practices by public, private and traditional institutions, with a view to eliminating gender stereotyping, prejudices and some barbaric customary practices (Eke, 2022).

Women in politics in Nigeria: The endangered species

The Nigerian State is a party to various treaties that protect the rights of women and has ratified these treaties. By these ratifications, Nigeria is duty- and morally bound not to carry out any action that contravenes the provisions of these treaties. Despite the fact that the horizontal inequality that exists between men and women in the public space results from the actions and inactions of state and non-state actors, and has conducted into women's subjugation that has impinged on their right to political participation, there is the more critical problem of violence against women in politics (VAWP) in Nigeria that threatens the continued presence or participation of women in the decision-making and governance process in the country.

VAWP is any act or threat of physical, sexual or psychological violence that prevents women from exercising and realising their political rights and a range of human rights; and it manifests in assassination, kidnapping, beating, verbal abuse, humiliating, dehumanising and so on, often with the intention of forcing or causing women to give up their rights or quest for political life (Stand To End Rape Initiative [STER], 2022). It is a widespread scourge that marginalises women in public life and is used as a tool to discourage women from participating in elections as candidates, voters or as administrators (Safir & Alam, 2015; Para-Mallam, 2015).

However, this trend is not unique to Nigeria. For instance, in 2018, Marielle Franco, a Brazilian activist and politician was killed in Rio De Janeiro. There is the case of Diane Abbott, a female Member of the British Parliament, who in the build-up to the parliamentary elections, received over 8,000 abusive tweets just to humiliate and intimidate her. Also, Jo Cox, a Labour Party Member of the British Parliament, was murdered in 2016. In the same vein, in 2015, Angiza Shinwari, a Provincial Councillor in East Afghanistan

and advocate for women's rights was killed by a targeted bomb attack (Spinks et al., 2024). What is unique in the case of Nigeria is that in spite of the very low and troubling women's representation in the country, women have become targets for political and electoral violence.

The dangers that women face in Nigerian politics with respect to political violence cannot be overstated. According to the coalition of civil society organisations with the support of UN Women and UNDP's Democratic Governance for Development (DGD), the majority of the attacks or political violence against women occurred during campaigns or rallies, while others took place at political party events, primarily by party supporters and their agents (Ede et al., n.d.). The rampant nature of intimidation, harassment and physical attacks on women politicians as well as female voters, points glaringly at electoral gender-based violence (Olawuyi, 2023). In the electoral process, women are often at the receiving end of political thugs and miscreants who inflict bodily harm on them. This action has far-reaching implications for democracy, human security, gender equality, human rights and political posterity in the country. The attacks have increased human rights violations and raised the wave of discrimination and political violence which has been weaponised against women (Abdullahi, 2022).

In Osun State for example, STER (2022) reported that about 50% of women identified as active and direct participants said that they have often been inflicted with injuries as a result of their participation in the election process. Some have had to trade sexual favours as active and direct participants in the political space (STER, 2022; Jimoh, 2023). The issue of sexual violence is one reason that many women are disengaged from politics and governance in Nigeria. For some, it is the fear and shame attached to it (sexual violence) while for others, their husbands and families dissuade them from participating (Para-Mallam, 2015).

In some cases, the violence results in the death of women. In 2019, in Kogi State for instance, the leader of the women in the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Ochadamu Local Government Area was burnt to death by political party thugs (Ogaziechi, 2021). Similarly, a woman leader of the Labour Party (one of the political parties in Nigeria) in Kaura Local Government Area of Kaduna State was killed by unknown gunmen on 28 November 2022 (Abdullahi, 2022). There was also a case of a woman who was beaten and almost stripped naked for supporting a political party (Ajanaku, 2015). According to Fadare (2023), violence against women sometimes takes the form of online violence that manifests in cyber-trolling, name-calling, manipulations of their picture and sexualisation.

Some women have endured humiliation in their political and public life. For example, Patricia Etteh, the only woman in the political history of Nigeria who managed to be elected Speaker of the Federal House of Representatives, was subjected to abuses, humiliated and forced to resign after spending only five months as Speaker to avoid being impeached. She was greeted with jeers and boos as she walked out of the Assembly Complex (Ogunmade, 2007). Also, women who are (were) appointees of governments are not spared in the political violence. Arunma Oteh, who was hired in 2010 to head the Security and Exchange Commission (SEC), was tagged a 'reformer' and was honoured with the national award of the Officer of the Order of the Niger (OON) in 2011 for her role in transforming the Nigerian Capital Market; was embarrassed and humiliated and accused of several allegations and was recommended for removal by both Houses of the male-dominated National Assembly (African Business, 2012). She was later exonerated and cleared of any criminal breaches and was recalled to complete her tenure in office (Olanihun, 2012).

In 2009 in Ekiti State, the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) was forced to resign in the course of the elections and went into hiding because of pressure from politicians and threats on her life (Alli, 2013).

Another tool of political violence used to threaten and frustrate women is deprivation and denial. Women are sometimes denied access to vital information and locations that can enhance their political participation. In Kogi State for example, female aspirants have sometimes been physically denied access to venues for primary elections or from attending party meetings (Para-Mallam, 2015).

The various challenges that women face and encounter in the political process in the country raise concerns for the future regarding women's representation in politics, and as such their existence in governance and politics seems endangered.

Women in politics and governance in Nigeria

With improved women's representation in African countries - like Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, and Liberia - Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, should not be seen to be lagging in this regard especially as it is party to various treaties on the rights of women in political representation. Over 49% of Nigeria's population consists of women, with a sex ratio of 102.78 males per 100 females (Ogbonna, 2016). Therefore, the importance and/or significance of their role in state-building cannot be overemphasised, especially within the context of the logic of the 'wealth in people,' as advanced by Mitchell (2012). In other words, denying or depriving women their roles in the collective decision-making process only robs the state of the prospects of

rapid development. According to Barack Obama, “no country can achieve its full potentials unless it draws on the talent of its entire people, and that must include half of the population who are women and girls” (Obama, as cited by Ajanaku, 2015).

Greater representation of women in governance and engagement in the decision-making process can lead to the formulation of policies that promote the reproduction of social life, which is the ultimate goal of the state. Women, who by nature are managers, managing the home by engaging in unpaid care and work, would see and take society as an extension of the home front; and the general well-being of the populace as their primary concern just the way they attend to and care for their children in the home. In Rwanda for example, the increase in female parliamentarians to over 50% (in the lower house) led to a rise in healthcare spending for citizens (Norville, 2011). In Malawi, women’s involvement in discussion groups and community meetings without the presence of men resulted in increased access to mental healthcare and reduced waiting time at community clinics and government health centres (Nazneen & Olivares, 2021).

In Nigeria, some Bills sponsored by female parliamentarians and passed into law by the National Assembly helped to improve efficiency in governance and demonstrated a form of concern for the plight of citizens. For example, the Bill for the Compulsory Treatment of Critical Condition Victims sponsored by Hon. Sunmonu Monsurat in 2016 and signed into law in 2017 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2017), mandated public hospitals and medical institutions to treat accident and gunshot victims immediately. The law also helped to eliminate the bureaucratic bottlenecks of police reports and receipts of payment of medical expenses before treatment (Eke, 2022).

With the growing concern for accountability, transparency and openness in government, particularly when it comes to how public resources are allocated and expended, women in governance have demonstrated a strong will for promoting public accountability. For instance, in 2015, Senator Abiodun Olujimi sponsored the Whistleblowers Protection Bill meant to, amongst other things, facilitate the protection of persons directly or indirectly involved in making disclosures for the public interest and for persons who may suffer reprisals in relation to these disclosures (Sahara Reporters, 2017). The bill was passed into law in 2017 and has been relevant in fighting corruption in Nigeria.

When women become more involved in politics, a system of holding public officials to account regarding public service delivery, thus improving the performance of political and public institutions, can evolve. Their attendance in public hearings, community scorecard meetings, participatory

budgeting, and public expenditure improves the quality of governance in the state (Nazneen & Olivares, 2021). In Nigeria, despite the very limited number of female parliamentarians, the women in the National Assembly have been able to sponsor some important Bills on social issues like health, education and environment. In education for instance, Hon. Sunmonu Monsurat sponsored the Bill on Tertiary Education Grant. This Bill was designed to provide better and increased access to grants in federal government tertiary institutions to encourage Nigerians to study courses and gain skills needed to thrive in focus sectors of the economy (Eke, 2022).

For Allah-Mensah (2004), a state operating a democratic system where the collective decision-making process is not gender-sensitive does not pass as a democracy, neither is it seen as representing virtues of credibility and equality which are integral parts of the democratic process. The good governance concept which is central to the third wave of globalisation advances the issue of women and human rights that attract global interest in Africa (Fatile et al., 2012). And for Nigeria to prove that it has overcome the effects of the many years of military rule and dictatorial regimes that envisioned no role for women in governance, women should be included in matters that pertain to state- and nation-building.

For a country like Nigeria, with a vibrant population of knowledgeable, strong, enterprising and competent women, it would amount to gross under-utilisation of human capital development capacity if a significant number of citizens are denied representation in the political process, as is the case at the moment. Historically, the pre-colonial period in Nigeria for example, is replete with cases of exploits of women in the social and political order such as Emotan of Benin, Moremi of Ile-Ife, Efunsetan of Ibadan, Queen Amina of Zazzau and so on. (Ajayi, 2007; Oluoh, 2023). In the colonial period, women were politically active in the state. For example, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, led women in Abeokuta in a protest against the unfair taxation imposed on women in Egbaland by the colonial administration (Johnson-Odim & Mba, 1997). Also, Hajiya Gambo Sawaba in Northern Nigeria, who became active in politics as early as 17 years old and was a member of the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) (Mohammed, 2023). She was vibrant in the campaign against child marriage, forced and unpaid labour and discriminatory taxes. Her political activism and vociferous nature earned her many arrests and imprisonment. In an article by *Aljazeera*, she was labelled “the most jailed Nigerian female politician” (Agunbiade, 2021).

In the present Fourth Republic, women occupy positions of authority and have displayed very high levels of knowledge, capacity, competency, and dexterity. Women like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Arunma Oteh, the late Dora Akunyili, Obiageli Ezekwesili and a host of others.

No doubt, there are clear evidences that women in Nigeria possess the capacity to hold public offices and they can be very active in the political processes of society, as seen from the antecedence of women in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial state in Nigeria. The limiting of the public space for women, even with a democratic order is reflective of the ideological orientation of the political system. In spite of this, the passion and strength that women in governance have shown with the sponsoring and eventual passage of critical and important Bills, that have helped to improve the standard of living of Nigerians, clearly reveals that an increased participation of women in politics can improve efficiency in governance.

Conclusion

The 'Women Question' in Nigeria has lingered for decades. Although women played a dominant role in the pre-colonial period in structuring society and contributing to social order, such exploits have not been transmitted to the contemporary political setting in the country today. The subjugation of women and the gender-based horizontal inequalities that exist in the system clearly justify the above assertion. Again, though evidences have shown that the horizontal inequalities amongst groups result in conflicts in society, the same cannot be said about men and women in the political space. However, there is the possibility of an eruption of gender crisis or conflicts, as the case may be, if the issue of the over-masculinisation of the public space in Nigeria is not satisfactorily addressed. This is because of the existence of the radical feminists who think that societal patriarchy can be defeated if women recognise their own value and strength, establish a sisterhood of trust with other women, confront oppression critically and form female-based separatist networks in the private and public sphere (Srivastava et al., 2017).

The harrowing experiences that women in the political space have endured and have encountered are capable of keeping them out of public life. Some who have encountered such violence have not been seen in the political arena since then.

The outcome of the 2023 General Elections in the country did not record any significant improvement in women's representation. In fact, in certain critical areas like the parliamentary elections, in the Senate in particular, women's representation witnessed a decline by about 4.2%. This is an indication that women's representation in Nigeria is a half-way house from reality and the principles of democracy which the Nigerian State claims to be operating.

Recommendations

To further improve female representation in governance in Nigeria, the following suggestions are recommended:

1. The place of a legal framework on the improvement of women's political representation cannot be overemphasised. In the light of this, the government of Nigeria should set machinery in motion to amend the Constitution and make provision for the reservation of a certain number of seats in parliament as is the case in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda. This would help in overcoming some cultural and social barriers that stand in the way of women in the quest for political representation.
2. It was observed that the patriarchal nature of the political space in Nigeria has been made possible by party structure. Therefore, political parties in the country should see it as a moral duty that they owe the nation to ensure that women occupy strategic positions in the party hierarchy. This would make women more active in the political process and in the decision-making of the party. Their presence should be reflected in meetings and caucuses and even in the elective processes for public offices.
3. Women should be encouraged as much as possible to begin their political quest from the local level so that they build their recognition, acceptance and network before aspiring to the national level. This can be accomplished by coordinating and organising women through advocacy groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and grassroots women's associations. This would help to improve their popularity and make them more marketable.
4. The Electoral Act should treat the issue of electoral violence as a severe offence and violators should be descended upon with the full weight of the law to serve as deterrence to violators in future elections and electoral activities. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be a stakeholder and first responder in this regard and must possess the will and capacity to push and prosecute cases of electoral violence.
5. The nocturnal nature of political and party meetings should be discouraged. Party and political meetings should be held as much as possible early during the day-time to avoid stretching deep into the night; where many women fear for their lives and fear for failing to attend to fulfil domestic responsibilities in their homes.

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