



Chapter 7

Conceptualising Women for Men (W4M) in Political Participation in Nigeria

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Abstract

The gains recorded in female political participation in Nigeria in the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999 has steadily declined. Increasing from 6.2% of women legislators in 1999 to a high of 15.2% in 2007, there has been a steady decline in female representation in Nigeria's parliaments to a dismal 10% in 2019. In the same vein, female participation in electoral politics has declined both in general voter participation and in elective positions in the 2023 elections. Although the global average for women in parliament is the same as that of sub-Saharan Africa at 19.2%, women's representation in Nigeria is at an all-time low of 7% at the national level and 5.5% at the state level. Legislative and judicial efforts at affirmative action for 35% of women's representation have met stiff opposition from politicians. Using key informant interviews (KIIs) of male and female leaders, policymakers and female advocates, this chapter conceptualises the subordination of women's political participation into subordinate supporting roles as Women for Men (W4M) political participation. We explored participants' perspectives on women's political participation, their beliefs about gender roles and expectations and factors that influence their views on female political participation. The study used thematic analysis. The study's findings reveal that men's conceptualisation of women's participation in politics is influenced by their socialisation and beliefs about gender roles



and expectations. However, the study also found that men's perspectives on women's political participation are sometimes positively influenced by women's achievements and successes in politics and by female role-models. The participants noted that the presence of women in leadership positions can challenge gender stereotypes and serve as role models for other women. This lends credence to the need for temporary special measures (TSMs) and affirmative actions.

Keywords: Female Participation, Gender Equity, Gender Norms, Temporary Special Measures (TSMs), Women for Men (W4M)

Introduction

Normative prescriptions of democracy require equal participation of men and women. Societies that have inclusive and participatory political institutions tend to be more peaceful and resilient (UNDP, 2021). On the other hand, societies that practice exclusion are more likely to be vulnerable to fragility and conflict. Gender exclusion is specifically highlighted as having significant implications in this regard. Baranyi and Powell (2005) argue that understanding gender roles and relations is essential for comprehending both the opportunities for and the threats to state-building. They assert that gender inclusion plays a central role in a country's pursuit of peace. This assertion further emphasises that many states, particularly those in Africa, rely on a development framework that fails to recognise the importance of women, their skills, and competences (Miller & Razavi, 1995; Bullough et al., 2012).

While there have been some improvements in female political participation globally and in some parts of Africa such as Rwanda and South Africa, the rate and pattern of political participation of females in Nigeria has declined. The extant patriarchal political structures and processes lead to unequal outcomes. Although gender inequalities in political participation can both mirror and reinforce gender-based social hierarchies within society since political participation is crucial for democracy and promoting equality (Lister, 2007; Verba et al., 1997), how structural and normative factors reify gender inequalities in political participation is not as clear.

The state of female political participation

The rate of female political participation in Nigeria has steadily declined since the commencement of the Fourth Republic in 1999. From an increase from 6.2% of women legislators in 1999 to a high of 15.2% in 2007, there has been a steady decline in female representation in Nigeria's parliaments to a dismal 10% in 2019 (Invictus Africa, 2023). In the same vein, female participation

in electoral politics has declined both in general voter participation and in elective positions. Although the global average for women in parliament is the same as that of sub-Saharan Africa at 19.2%, according to the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2019), women's representation in Nigeria is at an all-time low of 7.3% in the Nigerian Senate, and 3.6% in the House of Representatives, at the national level in the ninth assembly from 2019 to 2023. Women's representation in the state assemblies are at a dismal 5.5% (Amata, 2023).

In the 2023 General Elections, amongst the 92 individuals who vied for the 109 senatorial positions, constituting 8.4% of the total, only 3 women emerged victorious. The successful candidates include Ireti Kingibe, representing the Labour Party (LP) and hailing from the FCT; Idiat Adebule, affiliated with the All Progressives Congress (APC) and elected from the Lagos West District; and Ipalibo Harry Banigo, who belongs to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and secured the position in the Rivers West District. Out of the 288 women who ran for House of Representatives' seats, a mere 15 emerged as winners. Amongst them, eight were affiliated with the APC, four with the PDP, while one candidate each represented the LP, the APGA, and the YPP (*Premium Times*, 2023).

Empirical studies of female political participation have emphasised the role of socio-economic factors as determinants of female political participation in Nigeria. For instance, Dim and Asamoah (2019), using *Afrobarometer* surveys, found that older women in rural areas with a few years of education participated more actively as voters than younger, educated women living in urban areas. Whereas educated women living in urban areas are more likely to have the resources to stand for elections in Nigeria, self-employed and privately employed women participate more actively than unemployed and formally employed women. This is peculiar to African countries.

While there is a marked decline of institutional forms of female political participation such as voting and standing for elections, activist-styled forms of participation such as the female-led #BringBackOurGirls (BBOG) campaign (#BringBackOurGirls, 2024) and the #EndSARS movement (Uwazuruike, 2021) reveal that it is the pattern of participation that is ignored in the discussion of female political participation in Nigeria. Women have been actively involved in various forms of civic action, particularly through the BBOG and the #EndSARS movements. The BBOG movement utilised diverse media platforms and civic strategies to demand the government's intervention in rescuing more than 200 school girls who were kidnapped by Boko Haram terrorists in 2014 (Oladapo & Ojebode, 2018). Through social media activism, protests, rallies, and daily sit-ins, the BBOG movement

raised public awareness and garnered support locally and internationally, aiming to hold the government accountable for the safe release of the abducted Chibok schoolgirls (Aina et al., 2019).

The #EndSARS movement in Nigeria on the other hand was a widespread protest movement that emerged in October 2020. It called for the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigerian Police Force that had been accused of human rights abuses, extortion, and brutality against citizens, particularly in urban centres. The epicentres of the protests were urban areas in Southern states such as Abeokuta in Ogun and Ibadan in Oyo State. In Lekki, Lagos, it was largely coordinated by a feminist coalition. The movement gained momentum through social media platforms, particularly Twitter, where the hashtag #EndSARS was widely shared (Nwakanma, 2022).

The movement was largely decentralised, with no central leadership or single figurehead. Instead, it was driven by a collective of young Nigerians, activists, celebrities, and civil society organisations who were united in their demand for police reform and an end to police brutality. The movement attracted widespread support and participation both within Nigeria and across the Diaspora, with protests and demonstrations taking place in various cities in Nigeria and solidarity protests held in several countries around the world.

The #EndSARS movement not only focused on disbanding SARS but also called for wider police reform, accountability for officers involved in human rights abuses, and an end to impunity within the Nigerian Police Force. Despite facing significant challenges, including harassment, violence, and a crackdown by security forces, the movement succeeded in drawing global attention to the issue of police brutality in Nigeria and sparked conversations about systemic change and accountability within law enforcement.

Coffé and Bolzendahl (2010) have outlined the gendered pathways to female political participation in Western societies, finding differences between private forms of female political participation different from a direct form of male political participation. According to Townley (2019), the factors that influence women's political participation in European, American, and sub-Saharan African countries are likely to differ because of contextual variations between these regions. Unlike Western societies, where more education for females positively correlated with more active forms of political participation in Nigeria, while no education discourages political participation, fewer years of post-secondary education is positively correlated with more active forms of participation such as joining political parties and voting (Dim & Asamoah, 2019).

While little to no formal education is bad for female political participation, more years of schooling has mixed results. Economic indicators suggest that the effects of discretionary time and agency on female political participation particularly the differences noted in urban and rural women's political participation in Nigeria. While the cost in time utility of joining political parties is less for rural, less-educated women and informally employed women in urban centres, the cost in time utility is more for educated and formally employed women in urban centres. This often skews female political participation in party politics to women with more time and less agency to contest party executive positions.

This chapter agrees with Bourque and Grossholtz (1974) that the prescriptivist definition of terms of political science leads to erroneous conclusions, as for example in the description of political behaviour such as political participation; that women do not participate less, but rather differently (Parry et al., 1992; Harrison & Munn, 2007). It also draws on Buchanan's (2008) argument that the varying levels of success amongst different political communities in achieving commonly shared objectives may primarily stem from the combination of elements within the fundamental structure of rules rather than the differences between the political actors involved.

Political participation may be defined as "those activities of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government authorities, or the policies of government" (Conway 2001).

Political participation, broadly defined, are "those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take" (Verba & Nie, 1972). While there have been several criticisms of this definition, the emphasis on two distinct parts of the definition we suggest are sufficient to capture the whole gamut of political participation: first, activities aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel; second, activities aimed at influencing the actions that the personnel take. Partisan or political participation in party politics is selecting government personnel. This is often performed through voting and standing for elections, influencing policies and nudging government to take one course of action or the other is influencing the actions that the personnel of government should take. Sometimes, these two activities may be mutually enforcing.

How do socio-economic factors reify normative and structural determinants of political participation to explain the decline of female political participation in Nigeria? This chapter conceptualises 'Women for Men' (W4M) political participation as political activities of women often in

subordinate, private and shadowy roles that undermine their participation in more effective, consequential roles.

Patterns of ‘women for men’ female political participation

Electoral systems and female political participation

While the gender distribution of registered voters is reflective of the national population, leadership positions in elective positions do not reflect this. In 2023, 49.5 million out of a total population of 107 million men, and 44.4 million out of a total of 105 million women registered to vote (INEC, 2023; NBS, 2023).

The behaviour of political parties is influenced by the rules and procedures inherent in political systems, as discussed by scholars such as Norris (1997), Caul Kittilson (2006), and Macaulay (2006). Specifically, the electoral system establishes the overall framework within which parties compete and choose their candidates. It exerts an impact on political parties by providing incentives and limitations for the inclusion of women in electoral lists. There is a consensus amongst scholars that the electoral system plays a crucial role in determining the representation of women in public office, as highlighted by Rule (1987) and Norris (1985). Andersson (2020) suggests that proportional representative (PR) electoral systems favour better gender representation more than majoritarian electoral system.

Duverger’s (1954) Law is a political theory that suggests a relationship between electoral systems and party systems. Proposed by French sociologist Maurice Duverger, the law posits that plurality / majority electoral systems tend to lead to the formation of two-party systems, while proportional representation systems tend to encourage the presence of multiple parties.

When examining the relationship between Duverger’s Law and female political representation in Africa, it becomes evident that the electoral system can significantly impact women’s political participation and representation. While Duverger’s Law primarily focuses on party systems, its implications for gender dynamics within those systems are noteworthy.

In African countries, the adoption of electoral systems heavily influences the opportunities for women to enter politics and gain representation. Majority-plurality systems, commonly used in several African nations, tend to favour larger, established political parties and incumbents. These systems often present significant barriers for women, as they perpetuate the dominance of male elites and make it more challenging for new or marginalised groups, including women, to enter the political arena.

Countries such as Rwanda and South Africa have achieved notable success in promoting female political representation through the implementation of gender quotas and PR systems. Rwanda, in particular, has made remarkable strides, surpassing many countries globally in terms of women's parliamentary representation. This achievement can be attributed to both the adoption of PR and the establishment of a gender quota, which reserves at least 30% of parliamentary seats for women.

The winner-takes-all nature of majority-plurality systems creates a highly competitive environment, where women face considerable challenges in securing nominations and winning elections. These systems tend to prioritise male candidates who benefit from established party structures, financial resources, and networks of support. Consequently, female political representation in African countries with majority-plurality systems often remains low.

On the other hand, PR systems offer more opportunities for women's political representation. PR systems aim to allocate legislative seats in proportion to the overall vote share that each political party receives. This type of system promotes the presence of multiple parties and encourages political inclusivity. African countries with PR systems tend to exhibit higher levels of female political representation compared to those with majority-plurality systems (Bunwaree, 2006; Rosen, 2013). The proportional allocation of seats allows for greater diversity in party representation, enabling women to secure more positions in legislative bodies.

While gender quotas have played a significant role in promoting women's political representation in Africa, it has not in itself increased female political participation (Bauer & Burnet, 2013; Belschner & Garcia de Paredes, 2021) and may not decrease gender bias against female political participation (Clayton, 2018). Gender quotas are measures that mandate a minimum percentage of seats or candidate nominations to be reserved for women. In a majoritarian electoral system such as Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) can include a clause in the electoral bylaws to mandate political parties to have reserved seats for females in every election.

In majoritarian electoral systems such as Nigeria where all the mandate is claimed by the victorious party, political parties have little motivation to put female candidates up for election. Although major Nigerian political parties often give discounts for forms to female candidates, they often do not get to be ticket-bearers as the stakes for losing are much higher in electoral systems where the singular candidate who wins the elections claims the mandate. Countries that lead in better gender representation in Africa often

have a proportional electoral system, as the risk of losing a singular mandate with a female flag-bearer is mitigated by sharing of the seats in parliament according to percentages.

The Nigerian majoritarian electoral system subsumes all forms of women's political participation in one decisive moment of the electoral contest.

Employment and education

Although literature suggests that participation in paid employment and access to income are considered crucial factors that motivate women to actively engage in politics - particularly standing for elective office (Hern, 2020), Hern notes that African women who are involved in formal employment often acquire skills that contribute to their political participation. Isaksson (2014) however, notes that considering that political participation can be demanding and necessitates individual resources, it is even more so in Africa where citizens in young developing democracies face higher participation costs and possess fewer individual resources compared to citizens in more established democracies. In contrast to Western democracies, empirical evidence based on recent data from 20 emerging African democracies, encompassing over 27,000 respondents, indicates a weak explanatory power of the resource perspective (Gottlieb et al., 2018). Surprisingly, individuals with relatively limited resources tend to participate more extensively than those with greater resource endowments. While women with access to more economic resources may participate in party contests because of the level of economic resources required, they do not have the time to participate in the quotidian participation in political party organisation (NBS, 2021; Gottlieb et al., 2018; Olarinmoye, A. Personal Communication, August 24, 2023).

Data from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, Afrobarometer surveys on gender differences in political participations and interviews from female political aspirants are insightful (NBS, 2021; Gottlieb, Grossman & Robinson, 2018; Olarinmoye, A. Personal Communication, August 24, 2023). Women who are self-employed have an agency of time to participate in political party activities, and can combine that with the required resources to stand for office. On the other hand, educated women in paid employment often do not have the time to engage in party activities and have to sacrifice their careers to be seen and be heard. This comes at great cost to them which leaves the path of executive appointments an easier route to political participation. Those who dare are often seen as upstarts by those who have been engaged in the activities of the political party before election season (Olarinmoye, A. Personal Communication, August 24, 2023). The control that women exert over their

income from paid employment is as vital as the economic resources and skills it offers, enabling them to engage in political participation.

We found that having access to formal employment and career pathways is a positive factor that influences voting behaviour for women in both the Northern and Southern regions. However, Southern women tend to have more employment opportunities because of improved access to formal education. Surprisingly, the level of education itself presents a more complex situation. In our study, we found that for Southern women, higher education is associated with a decreased likelihood of voting in an election, and for Northern women, a decreased likelihood of working for a candidate. These findings indicate that in Southern Nigeria, women with lower levels of education are more likely to engage in political participation through voting (Datzberger & Le Mat, 2019; Isaksson, 2014; Oladapo et al., 2021) and more likely to participate in campaign rallies and party primaries. While women with higher levels of education are more likely to stand for elections in urban centres, women with some education who are self-employed are much more likely to contest elections.

Gender norms and political participation

The 2023 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state highlighted the pernicious hold of gender norms in political participation for aspirants. Abdul-Azeez Olajide Oladiran of the Peoples Democratic Party and his running mate, TV star, Funke Akindele were derided for their marital status in political campaign rallies (GboahTV, 2023). The song illustrates how gender roles and marital status can be politicised.

The marital status of women in Nigeria reifies existing gender norms and stands against political participation of women. In Nigeria, women face obstacles in their active political participation because of their marital status because they have to be either related to their father or their husband. This affects their ability to run for elective positions or be selected for political roles. To address this, the House of Representatives amended the Federal Character Commission Establishment Act in 2010 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010), allowing married women to choose either their fathers' or husbands' states or local governments of origin when implementing the Federal Character formulae at the national or state level. This amendment aims to promote the fair distribution of public offices and resources. However, it fails to recognise Nigerian women as equal citizens with equal rights of citizenship as their male counterparts.

Female political aspirants usually have to retain their father's name or return to their father's state of origin to stand for elections and may

not be able to contest for elections in their primary place of residence and occupation. This often limits the chances of educated, formally employed women who may have to leave where they are popular for constituencies where their maiden name is more popular than their presence.

On the one hand, according to research conducted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), there are gender disparities in political knowledge, discussion, and participation in Nigeria (Casserly, 2016). The study reveals that there is a 13% gender gap in political knowledge - individuals' self-reported understanding of political processes, institutions, rights, governance issues, and current affairs; a 5% gender gap in political discussion - political discussion is defined as individuals' self-reported engagement in conversations about local or national politics or governance issues with other people; and a 16% gender gap in political participation - individuals' self-reported involvement in organised efforts to address problems, contacting local or national officials, reaching out to traditional leaders, participating in marches or demonstrations, participating in local meetings, and voting.

On the other hand, the active involvement of women in peacebuilding initiatives and market exchange serves as proof of their ability to engage in governance on a wider scale. Research has demonstrated that women who lead organisations focused on countering violent extremism have contributed to positive outcomes in terms of women's inclusion and gender equality in politics and society (Nwangwu & Ezeibe, 2019; Nwakanma, 2023). The effective utilisation of social power by young urban women led by the Feminist Coalition (FEMCo) to protest police brutality lends credence to this. The FEMCo is a women's advocacy group that was established in July 2020. Its primary goal is to promote equality for women in Nigerian society, focusing on education, financial freedom, and representation in public office (Feminist Coalition, 2023). The coalition was formed by a diverse group of fourteen women with professional backgrounds in various sectors such as technology, media, grassroots community organising, public health, finance, gender advocacy, and the non-profit sector (Nwakanma, 2023).

The initial project undertaken by FEMCo was to provide support to the #EndSARS movement. They utilised crowdfunding to gather donations for peaceful #EndSARS protests, specifically focusing on necessities like water, food, legal assistance, and medical aid. These forms of political participation mutated and contributed to the loss of the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Party (APC) in the presidential polls to the third-party maverick presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP), Peter Obi.

Organisational contributions of women in political parties and female engagement in social movements often do not translate to more effective mobilisation for more female participation, because paradoxically, demographics that make female leaders effective in utilising their social power stands in their way of more open political participation. Leaders of women-led social movements are often urban and educated and have significant social power and resources. However, the lack of organisational structure that serves as support structures for contesting political offices are often lacking in the leadership of the social movements and the deployment of their social power. While leaders of male-led organisations such as previous presidents of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUT) and the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) have been able to convert their social capital to holding political offices respectively as Governors and Senators, their female counterparts have not been as successful.

These forms of political participation in professional organisations are reflective of the same barriers to women's larger political participation. The President of the National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives, which is a trade union whose members are mostly female, is a man. By deploying their social power to single-issue, social movement causes, female political contributions are subsumed into subservient roles.

Conclusion

The gender distribution of registered voters in Nigeria reflects the national population, but the representation of women in elective leadership positions does not. The electoral system plays a crucial role in shaping gender dynamics within political systems. Majoritarian electoral systems, common in African countries, tend to favour larger political parties and incumbents, making it more challenging for women to enter politics and gain representation where gender quotas are not enshrined. On the other hand, proportional representation systems offer more opportunities for women's political representation by promoting the presence of multiple parties and encouraging political inclusivity.

Gender norms and socio-economic indicators also significantly influence women's political participation. Traditional gender roles and marital status norms can act as barriers, limiting women's involvement in politics. Socio-economic factors such as employment and education play a complex role. While access to formal employment and career pathways can motivate women's political participation, higher levels of education

can sometimes decrease their likelihood of engaging in certain forms of participation.

Gender quotas have been instrumental in promoting women's political representation in Africa, but they alone may not increase female political participation or address gender bias against women in politics. The majoritarian electoral system in Nigeria poses challenges for female political aspirants, as political parties have little incentive to field female candidates because of the winner-takes-all nature of the system. Access to economic resources and control over income can enable women to engage in political participation, but time constraints and societal expectations can create trade-offs for women with higher education and paid employment.

The active involvement of women in peacebuilding initiatives, market exchange, and social movements demonstrates their capacity to engage in governance and effect positive change. Organisations like the Feminist Coalition have showcased the mobilisation and impact of women-led advocacy groups in challenging societal norms and advocating for equality.

To enhance women's political participation in Nigeria, it is essential to address the barriers created by traditional gender norms, improve access to education, promote economic empowerment, and implement electoral reforms. While adopting a proportional representation system may not be feasible as this may require constitutional reforms, implementing gender quotas by the electoral body can create a more inclusive political landscape that allows for greater female representation. Additionally, creating supportive structures within political parties and organisations can help to harness the social power of women leaders and facilitate their transition into formal political roles.

Ultimately, achieving gender equality in political participation requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses systemic barriers, challenges gender norms, and fosters an enabling environment for women's active involvement in governance. By promoting women's political participation, Nigeria can benefit from diverse perspectives, improved decision-making, and a more inclusive democracy.

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