

## Chapter 10

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# Beyond Women's Representation and Good Governance in Nigeria: Interrogating the Role of Religion and Corruption

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### Abstract

Women constituted more than 50% of the Nigerian voting population, yet they are hardly represented in elective and leadership positions. Women's representation in leadership and decision-making positions has seen significant progress globally. However, numerous barriers continue to hinder women's representation in Nigeria which hinder full gender parity. Amongst these barriers, religion and corruption emerge as pivotal factors. Religion, with its profound influence on cultural and societal norms, can either empower or restrict women. Corruption, on the other hand, undermines democratic processes and often marginalises those already disadvantaged, including women. This chapter therefore explores the intricate relationship between representation, good governance, religion and corruption in Nigeria using documentary sources. It was revealed that the roles of religion and corruption in shaping women's representation are complex and multifaceted. While both can pose significant challenges, they also present opportunities for positive change. By addressing these factors through targeted policies, public awareness and anti-corruption institutional reforms, it is possible to enhance women's representation and move towards greater gender equality. The chapter concludes that with greater awareness, an enabling environment, better political commitment and policies, women's political participation in Nigeria will improve remarkably.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Governance, Institutional Reforms, Policy Reform, Religion, Women's Representation

## Introduction

Gender inclusion is important for inclusive and sustainable development. Despite this recognition, limited progress has been made in promoting gender inclusion and women's empowerment in Nigeria in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015). The outcomes of the 2023 Nigerian General Elections, where less than 5% of female candidates won their elections, further accentuate the poor state of women's representation in governance in Nigeria. Such a decline could undermine the concerns and interests of women in public policy and decision-making, undercut women's empowerment, and ultimately deter inclusive political, socio-economic and human development. However, it should be noted that the problem of under-representation of women in governance is not peculiar with Nigeria as many advanced democracies such as the United States continue to grapple with this issue (Ramos & Da Silva, 2020).

In spite of this global under-representation of women in governance, it should be noted that women's representation varies from country to country and larger representation is witnessed in the legislative arm of government than in the executive arm (Goetz, 2003). Established liberal democracies such as the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK) and Canada have recorded a general increase in women's political representation in recent years (Wineinger & Nugent 2020). For instance, in 2014, an increase in the number of women in the US's congress and state legislatures saw them occupy 19% and 24% of the seats respectively. Similarly, some of Africa's democracies made giant strides in increasing women's political representation. For instance, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda, Mozambique, South Africa and Namibia have all recorded an increase in the number of women in their parliaments in recent years (Townley, 2019). Based on data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2020), current figures for women's representation in these countries as of 2020 are: Rwanda (61.3% lower house, 38.46% upper house), South Africa (46.58% upper house, 37.74% lower house), Namibia (43.27% lower house, 19.05% upper house), Mozambique (41.2%), Ethiopia (38.8% lower house, 32% upper house), and Uganda (34.9% lower house)

Paradoxically, from the statistics above of African countries, it appears that some of the African countries are relatively politically empowered when measured by the percentage of women in parliament, in ministerial positions, and the number of years that a country has had a female head of state in the last 50 years (Hausmann et al., 2006). For instance, while there has never been a female president in the US, arguably the most advanced democracy in the world, Liberia produced Africa's first elected female president, Ellen Sirleaf Johnson, in 2005. Two women have been elected president of African

countries since then: Ameenah Gurib-Fakim of Mauritius in 2015 and Sahle-Work Zewde of Ethiopia in 2018 (Ohemeng, 2019).

Even though some African countries have excelled at improving women's representation in governance, the socio-cultural contexts and entrenched patriarchal institutions in developing countries including Nigeria complicate the problem of women's under-representation in governance to a greater extent than in the Western countries. In specific terms, since 1999, the number of women (that is, above 50% of the population) in politics and decision-making bodies today does not reflect their numerical strength (Mohamed et al., 2015). This is noticeable as the national average of women's political participation in Nigeria has remained at 6.7% in elective and appointive positions, which is far below the global average of 22.5%; the Africa regional average of 23.4%, and West African sub-regional average of 15%. For instance, out of the 36 recently confirmed ministerial appointments by the administration now in power, only six are women, representing 16.7%. In the National Assembly, women constitute 5.6% of members of the House of Representatives and 6.5% of the Senators. Also, with the fifteen years of uninterrupted democratic governance (1999-2015), Nigeria is yet to produce a female governor in any of the 36 states of the Federation (Agbalajobi, 2010). This shows that Nigeria has not attained 30% affirmative action, as prescribed by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN, 1995). At the legislative arm, eight women were elected senators in 2007; the number dropped to seven in 2011, and rose back to eight in 2015, with eight being the highest number of female senators ever recorded in the country since 1999. The situation is not any different in the 360-member Federal House of Representatives, which recorded its highest female representation in 2011 with a total of 26 women elected (7.2%).

Over time, researchers have argued that the gender gap in governance in Nigeria is responsible for the slow pace of development, as excruciating poverty exists side by side with obscene opulence. For instance, according to the National Demographic Health Survey (NDHS) (NPC, 2013), the maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity in Nigeria is one of the highest in the world, with an estimated 545 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births. 158 of every 1,000 children younger than five years of age die of preventable diseases yearly (Orude, 2014). Almost 70% of the population lives on less than \$2.15 per day while life expectancy stands at 52 years. According to the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), Nigeria has the largest number of out of school children (10.5 million) in the world (Orude, 2014).

Understandably, for development of any kind to be successful, a vantage position should be accorded to the women, as they constitute 49.5% of the population. In this regard, they should not be left out on the issues

of decision-making that could have effects on their lives. Their presence in decision-making at all levels of governance could enhance equal allocation and sharing of important resources between the sexes. The World Bank, the United Nations and many international organisations recognise that women's representation and voices in decision-making bodies can contribute to changes in laws, policies, service delivery, cultural perceptions, and social norms that over time will improve and enhance women's agency (World Bank, 2012). Therefore, when women are empowered as political leaders, countries experience higher standards of living, positive developments can be seen in education, infrastructure and health, and concrete steps are taken to help make democracy deliver (NDI, 2007).

The thrust of this chapter is that while countries like Malawi, Kenya, South Africa, France, Finland, Norway and Spain have introduced quota systems to address gender inequality in both elective and appointive positions (Klettner et al., 2016), in Nigeria, policymakers, traditional and religious leaders have not taken decisive actions to address gender concerns, hence the rejection of the Gender and Equal Opportunity (GEO) Bill by the Senate on the grounds of religion and cultural inclinations (Makinde et al., 2017). Further accentuating this situation of women's representations are the lack of effective government action; lower levels of female employment and education; sexist attitudes, sometimes but not always deriving from religious or traditional practices; a corrupt and patronage-based political system (Kelly, 2019). However, this study seeks to interrogate the role of religion and corruption in undermining effective women's representation in governance in Nigeria as this will further contribute to developing the existing knowledge on the issue.

## Conceptual exploration

### **Exploring the concept of women's political participation and representation**

Awofeso and Odeyemi (2014), in their study titled *Gender and political participation in Nigeria: a cultural perspective*, defined political participation as; a voluntary act which encompasses a wide range of political activities, including voting in elections, contesting for political and party offices, attending political rallies, joining political parties etc. Ezedikachi (2016) gave a similar conception that political participation is the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs, and the opportunity to register as a candidate to campaign, to be elected and to hold office at all levels of government. More so, Kelly (2019) observed that political participation includes voting, work

on election campaigns, engagement in the community, and contact with political leaders and attendance at demonstrations.

Above the activities of political participation are considered to be a 'free zone' to all qualified citizens, especially in liberal democracies irrespective of disparities in wealth, education and gender. Experiences in African countries generally, and in Nigeria in particular, show that certain cultural values have systematically over the years impeded the female gender from participating in politics, at least to a certain degree tend to re-define the tenets of participatory democracy. In this regard, Tamunosaki and Emmanuel (2019), quoting Roberts and Edwards (1991), opines that political representation could be said to be a process in which one person or group has the capacity usually formally established, to speak and act on behalf of a larger number of other persons or groups.

The idea of what constitutes political participation and how it relates to political representation is made succinct by the submission of Milbrath (1965), who classified political participation activities into three, namely, gladiatorial activities, transitional activities and spectator activities. Political activities such as holding public or party offices, canvassing for party funds, contesting at elections, etc. are classified under gladiatorial activities. Transitional activities include activities such as attending political meetings or political rallies, making monetary contributions to political parties, and so on. Spectator activities on the other hand include political activities such as wearing of party badges, caps, uniforms or emblems, running errands for political leaders, voting at elections, etc. In Milbrath's classification, political participation and political representation constitute the highest category of political participation - the gladiatorial activities. These activities had always favoured the male gender in Nigeria from independence to date. Available statistics on gender representation in public offices, especially, at the highest decision-making levels such as the offices of the president, state governor and local government chairperson, reveal that female representation was almost at zero frequency. Except in a few instances where women were elected as local government chairpersons, no women have ever in the history of Nigerian elections been elected as chief executive either at the national or state levels. Similarly, a summary of gender representation in the National Assembly during the 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections, added together, shows that women were ridiculously under-represented by 5% in each of the two Houses of Assembly. Besides, no woman has ever ascended to the office of the Senate President, while the only female, Patricia Etteh, who was elected as Speaker of the House of Representatives in 2007, was impeached by a male-dominated House before the end of her tenure (Awofeso & Odeyemi, 2014).

### **Good governance: Definition and indicators**

Governance is the process of organising and mobilising people and resources to achieve a common goal. It is the process of motivating people to participate actively in dreaming dreams and seeing the vision of a possible future, encouraging them to own the vision and use their energies, resources and possibilities to work cooperatively together to realise the virtues, dreams and possibilities (Asobie, 2012). Governance can be good or bad. In other words, there is good governance and bad governance (Odeh, 2015).

Good governance encompasses certain standard principles: accountability, transparency, civil participation, achievement of results and impact. Bad governance is featured by corruption, exclusiveness, opacity and focus on output rather than outcome (Akhakpe, 2014). Corruption therefore is a component of governance, notwithstanding bad governance or negation of good governance (Asobie, 2012). In like manner, good governance has been defined as the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a nation's affairs, and the complex mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens' groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences. Accountability, transparency, participation and legitimacy are the core elements of good governance. Gender responsiveness is essential to all of these and is a measure of good governance. Analysis and action on gender issues, the participation of women as well as men in governance processes at all levels, and the recognition by institutions of women's rights and needs, are central to good governance as to poverty reduction (Aina & Olayode, 2011).

Good governance, amongst other things, must be participatory, transparent, accountable, effective, and equitable, as well as promote the rule of law. In upholding the rule of law, good governance must ensure the effective and equitable distribution of the state's resources amongst citizens and operate within the confines of well-articulated objectives of the government (Riman et al., 2023). In general, good governance symbolises a strong partnership between the state and society and amongst its citizens, linking transparency, the rule of law, and accountability (Al-Faryan & Shil, 2023). To this end, Akhakpe (2014) added that some characteristics of good governance include that: it is participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimised, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society (Downer, 2000).

Contributing to the discussion of good governance, Anazodo et al. (2015) conceived the term from two perspectives; political and economic. Politically, Anazodo et al. (2015) describe good governance as the establishment of a representative and accountable form of government; which requires a strong and pluralistic civil society, where there is freedom of expression and association; sets of rules governing the actions of individuals and organisations and the negotiation of differences between them; and requires the primacy of the rule of law, maintained through an impartial and effective legal system; and finally requires a high degree of transparency and accountability in public and corporate processes. Economically, Anazodo et al. (2015) maintained that good governance requires policies to promote broad-based economic growth, a dynamic private sector and social policies that will lead to poverty reduction through policies and institutions that improve access to quality education, health and other services that underpin a country's human resource base.

Similarly, according to Alam (2009), good governance can only be accomplished in a system virtually free from abuse and corruption, and a system that gives due regard to the enthronement of rule of law. On this note, Kefela (2011) added that good governance is an essential precondition for any country to achieve income equality, full democratisation and sustainable economic development. The definitions of Alam (2009) and Kefela (2011) align with the World Bank's (1994) submission that good governance is "how power is exercised in managing a country's economic and social resources for development". As nations grow and integrate into the world order, there has been an outcry for good governance. Studies have shown that there exist six dimensions of governance: voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, the rule of law, and control of corruption (Lee et al., 2018).

It could be inferred from the above that good governance promotes inclusivity and elimination of all cleavages that undermine the effective participation of any member of society as a precondition for the attainment of sustainable development. Therefore, the idea of women's under-representation is an aberration of the tenets of good governance and responsible for the slow pace of development in most African countries, including Nigeria. This is because, as Cheng (2014) asserts, women possess a different method of governance from men; the former's method helps to achieve results through cooperation, empathy and concern for the less privileged. This represents a sense of team spirit towards achieving progress.

### **The role of religion on women's representation**

This section explores the complex relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria. It will discuss how religious beliefs and institutions influence political decisions and governance, and the dual role of religion in either promoting or hindering women's participation in governance. This is because religion and patriarchal values seem to be instruments of women's domination and exclusion in most African countries, including Nigeria. This was rightly noted years back by Aina (1998) that with patriarchal values and the infusion of religion into politics, the Nigerian political setting has often promoted men's dominance in politics and political leadership, which aid the suppression of women's political aspirations and ambitions with differing experiences from the regions of the country. In this regard, the British Council Nigeria's (2012) report noted that Northern and rural regions see lower levels of female representation (British Council Nigeria, 2012). Kelly (2019) believes that while some commentators point to religion as a factor inhibiting women's representation and being responsible for the regional differences, it is clear that a number of socio-economic, cultural and geographical causes are at play. Data from the state level reveal regional variations in women's representation. Findings from a study titled *Can women break through? Women in municipalities: Lebanon in comparative perspective?* by Kassem (2012), revealed that gender inequality is a pervasive global phenomenon, especially in political circles. This is an indication that the issue of females' low representation is not peculiar to Nigeria.

The religious system in Nigeria is expected to advocate for women's liberation, freedom and more participation in decision-making. It is apparently that the status of the study of women in religion also reflects the status of women in society as a whole (Sibani, 2017). Religion plays a vital role in the cultural life of different spaces; it is deeply rooted in peoples' experiences and influences the socio-economic and political direction of society. Akindele & Dunmade (2020), therefore, believe that religion in Nigeria has encouraged certain women who have risen to significant positions and that there was no statistically significant difference between Christianity, Islam and other religion in their participation in the decision-making process. Adeogun (2016) therefore, maintains that different challenges have been identified in various studies on women and politics as inhibiting women's political participation. Some of these are vulnerability, fear of internal ostracism, and male dominance, stigmatisation, low level of education, meeting schedules, financing, political violence, religious and cultural barriers.

Contributing to the discussion of religion and women's representation, Para-Mallam, (2006) opines that women are negatively affected by the

religious values, norms and laws that are imposed on them, legitimising male dominance and leading to the marginalisation of women. This is even as everyone in Nigeria is granted equality under Nigeria's statutory and common laws, Para-Mallam maintained that this is merely in principle. In practice, the lives of many Nigerians are ruled by customary and sharia law. Merging religion with native customs affects women at all levels of society – grassroots and elite levels of society who, according to the patriarchal view, are not seen as complete human beings until they are married (Para-Mallam, 2006). This is further worsened by the fact that girls and women, through their religious education, are taught their beliefs regarding gender roles. Women then become conflicted. This is after being taught to accept their social roles and interests by the patriarchal religious societies. It becomes difficult for them to accept a feminist scheme that removes obstacles to women's abilities to function as human beings, and thus advance gender equality (Para-Mallam, 2006) hierarchies that exist in both Christian and Muslim laws that make it more difficult for women to seek gender equality.

In contrast to the submission of Akindele and Dunmade (2020) above, a study of several African countries by Isaksson et al. (2014) revealed that religious and traditional gender norms inhibit women's participation in some contexts. Kelly (2019) reports that in Nigeria, religious and traditional norms reinforce practices which inhibit women's political participation. Therefore, Orji et al. (2018) observe that some Nigerian political parties build their functionalities around religious and cultural norms, thereby enshrining some forms of gender roles. By doing this, these parties restrict women to ceremonial and support roles, excluding them from core political issues and decisions. Swamy et al. (2020) examined the effect of women's representation in parliament on corruption, using a micro-data set from 350 selected firms in Georgia. The study concluded that countries with cultural and religious bias have lower women's representation in parliaments, hence this increases the probability of corruption. Riman et al. (2023) had a similar finding that; "cultural practices and the country's religious inclination also play a huge role in determining women's involvement in democratic governance, especially in male chauvinistic society".

Similarly, Dim and Asomah (2019) found that a Christian religious affiliation significantly enhances Nigerian women's political participation. However, cultures and religions moderated by patriarchy usually privilege men in leadership positions over women (Orji et al., 2018). Within such patriarchal contexts, like in most Nigerian societies, women's representation in elective public office is negatively affected (Pyeatt & Yanus, 2017). In a culture that considers women as primarily home makers, the political participation opportunities that could have arisen from women's

participation in paid employment are often neutralised by the burden of homemaking (Orji et al., 2018). This is just as it was discovered by Samuel and Segun (2012), that male domination of political leadership in society is entrenched through the patriarchy system and religious orthodoxy are cultural factors that affect women's political participation.

Furthermore, the study conducted by Akindele and Dunmade (2020) titled *The role of gender and religion on women participation in decision-making process in Nigeria*, revealed that the relationship between religion and gender equality can be explained by the assertion that society with higher religiosity accepts the authority of religious teachers, who advocate a patriarchal organisation of society. It is obvious that those women, who adhere to the dominant religions, might also not be inclined to take part in their society's public life, because of their upbringing and social tradition surrounding them. The assertion of Akindele and Dunmade (2020) is in line with submissions of researchers on the two dominant religions, Islam and Christianity. For instance, Ejumudo (2013) discovered that though protestant religion is beginning to encourage women's prominence in public life, religious orthodoxy continues to place restrictions on the extent of females featuring in political activities. The instrument of sex segregation and purdah are found to restrict women's empowerment by limiting their exposure to interact with male and female constituents and to attend public meetings. These factors have consigned women to be subordinate to men and has created women's inferiority complex.

From the other religious perspective, Fahm's (2021) study titled *Muslim Women and the Nigerian Party Politics* revealed that the involvement of Muslim women in party politics in Nigeria was impeded by cultural and religious bottlenecks and not lack of participation. It concluded that emphasis should be placed on the complementarity roles between men and women in order to suppress the intolerance often encountered by Muslim women in Nigerian party politics. Hence, there is a need for the existing political parties and most especially the ruling party to take advantage of the complementary differences in order to create balance in political decision-making. On a similar note, some scholars searched for answers within societies' religious, cultural, and political systems. They argue that patriarchal practices and understandings, especially those based on religious teachings, are seen as serious hindrances to women's access to political power. Matland and Günemurat (2011), in their study titled *Women as Candidates: An Experimental Study in Turkey*, added that this obstacle is often seen as huge in countries where Islam is the dominant religion. This reinforces the earlier findings of Amusan et al. (2017), titled *Patriarchy, religion and women's political participation in Kwara State, Nigeria* confirms the influence of religion on women's representation in Nigeria.

The study discovered that patriarchy permeates religion through the skewed interpretation of religious text (Qur'an and Hadith) in ways that advance the entrenchment of male dominance in social life in the study area, and by extension, Kwara State.

Amusan et al. (2017) add that although politics has traditionally been masculine in nature, women have found their attempts at breaking the barriers largely unwelcoming by society especially in the context of hostile religious and patriarchal values. While this study affirms that there is a significant relationship between religion and women's participation in politics, it is important to reiterate that religious texts (in particular the Qur'an) did not contain any categorical pronouncements barring women from political participation in particular and social life of their community in general. This study examines the linkage between patriarchy and religion (Islam) and how both impact on women's participation in politics in Kwara State. The study finds that patriarchy permeates religion through the skewed interpretation of religious text (Qur'an and Hadith) in ways that advance the entrenchment of male dominance in political and social life, not just in the study area, but across most of Northern Nigeria. However, it is important to note that neither Islam nor Christianity disallows women's active participation in politics inclusive of contesting for important political positions. Rather what has been the practice is the use of misinterpretation of religious text (Qur'an and Hadith) to reinforce patriarchal stereotypes that women are not suitable to occupy important leadership positions on the basis of gender categorisation.

The above finding by Amusan et al. (2017) is in line with the findings of Doumato and Posusney (2003); Al-Khateeb (1998); Jarallah (1996); and Gazali (1990), who all argue that Islam views a woman as playing an integral role in all aspects of society. Thus, the use of texts of the Qur'an or Hadith to support the position that Islam is against women's participation in politics represents a dis-ingenuous way of advancing patriarchal values and entrenching a male dominant position in political and social life. This is particularly the case in Muslim-dominated Northern Nigeria, wherein politics is seen as men's exclusive preserve because of cultural factors that a dis-ingenuous interpretation of texts of the Qur'an and Hadith were deployed to reinforce and give legitimacy by religious leaders (Ekundayo & Ama, 2014).

Olubela (2023), Omotola (2007) and Udoh et al. (2020) confirm the influence of religion on women's representation. For Olubela (2023), in a study titled *Nigerian Women's Participation in Politics: Historical and Social Acceptance Issues*, revealed that the low participation of women in politics was fostered by marginalisation, discrimination, ethnicity, religion, and the nature of post-colonial politics. Government should eliminate structural and

legal obstacles that hinder women's participation in politics and decision-making and hold those obstructing them accountable. Omotola (2007) gives particular importance to the salience of the traditional belief and value system and how religious beliefs, values and practices reinforce tradition to entrench male dominance in social life and by corollary political participation and representation. On the part of Udoh et al. (2020), in their study titled *The influence of religion and culture on women's rights to property in Nigeria*, give a balanced view of the influence of religion on women's representation that culturally, women are viewed as inferior to men, and a male child is generally celebrated and allotted higher portions of properties. However, the tenets of both Islam and Christianity do not disregard the woman in terms of property rights and that the prevailing discrimination against women has no religious backing, but a misguided exploitation of the low educational status of women in Nigeria. This chapter therefore agrees with this submission of Udoh et al. (2020) and conform the assumption of Ukachukwu (2018) that the intersecting factors of gender, religion and culture put severe pressures on women, which tend to have a negative impact on their work-life balance.

### **The role of corruption on women's representation**

An in-depth analysis of the nature and scope of corruption in Nigeria will be provided here. The section will examine how corruption undermines good governance especially as it relates to women's representation and whether women, when in positions of power, face unique challenges related to corruption or exhibit different behaviours compared to their male counterparts.

Generally, one of the selling points of the advocacy for women's participation in governance is driven from the argument that women appointed into administrative or political positions are less corrupt (Esarey & Schwindt-Bayer, 2017). This is because mainstreaming gender in governance is presumed to be a panacea against corruption. Said et al. (2016) present this argument in the following manner: "gender balance is achieved when women and men, boys and girls, have equal rights and opportunities to contribute to governance and contribute to society's development. Women and children are more adversely affected by the practice of corruption than men in society because of their vulnerability and dependence on men for daily upkeep. Thus, women are not readily exposed to/having much access to funds required to spend on corrupt officials or persons holding political power". Hence, it suffices to say that studies that attempt to justify the inclusion of women in governance have been based on the premise that women are more risk-averse than men. Since corruption is a criminal offence that attracts punishment, women are more afraid of being punished publicly (a disgrace that most

women would not want to face). Thus, women seek accountability while in public office and would work assiduously to promote good governance and reduce corruption in public office. What then is corruption, its implications and how does it impact on women's representation?

The United Nations (UN) Convention Against Corruption (UN, 2004) defined corruption as the "abuse of power for private gain". However, a clearer and more focused definition was offered by Transparency International (2016), that corruption is; "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain". Dialoke et al. (2020) add that corruption can be viewed as a change from the laws or general accepted rules for personal or selfish gain which is found in every organisation, be it a political, economic or social organisation, and it is an abuse, whereby public rules and processes are upturned by private agents who offer for personal or individual benefit and profit. On a similar note, Merkle et al. (2021) define corruption as an abuse of power for private gain, and its impacts are far-reaching in terms of stalling economic growth, diverting funds from essential infrastructure and undermining public confidence.

The above is an indication that corruption has no universal definitions about what specific sorts of conduct should be included or excluded. The complex nature of corruption and the many ways in which it operates in practice make the act of developing a universal index a complicated task. However, it should be noted that corruption takes various forms as highlighted in Table 21.

In a similar manner, in Nigeria, the official working definition of corruption, as provided by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) anti-corruption law includes bribery, fraudulent acquisition of property, fraudulent receipt of property, the use of pecuniary advantage, gratification, influence peddling, insincerity in advice with a view to gaining advantage, less than a full day's work for a full day's pay, tardiness and laziness. It also includes failure to report any case of inducement to the appropriate authorities (Akanbi, 2004).

**Table 21:** Categories of corruption

Categories of corruption	Description
Bribery	The act of dishonestly persuading someone to act in one’s favour by a payment or other inducement. Inducements can take the form of gifts, loans, fees, rewards or other advantages (taxes, services, donations, etc.). The use of bribes can lead to collusion (e.g. inspectors under-reporting offences in exchange for bribes) and/or extortion (e.g. bribes extracted against the threat of over-reporting).
Embezzlement	To steal, misdirect or misappropriate funds or assets placed in one’s trust or under one’s control. From a legal point of view, embezzlement need not necessarily be or involve corruption
Facilitation payment	A small payment, also called a “speed” or “grease” payment, made to secure or expedite the performance of a routine or necessary action to which the payer has legal or other entitlement.
Fraud	The act of intentionally and dishonestly deceiving someone in order to gain an unfair or illegal advantage (financial, political or otherwise).
Collusion	An arrangement between two or more parties designed to achieve an improper purpose, including influencing improperly the actions of another party.
Extortion	The act of impairing or harming, or threatening to impair or harm, directly or indirectly, any party or the property of the party to influence improperly the actions of a party.
Patronage, clientelism, nepotism	Patronage at its core means the support given by a patron. In government, it refers to the practice of appointing people directly

Sources: Adapted from Johnson (2014), and World Bank (2012).

In relation to gender, corruption, which drains public resources and takes much-needed funds away from national economic development or social services, disproportionately affects women and the poor, who are most dependent on them. Women may also be in less powerful positions to challenge corruption when it occurs. Alternatively, they may face gendered forms of corruption such as the demand for sex in return for particular services or resources (Aina & Olayode, 2011). More so, an analysis of country-level data indicated that higher levels of women’s participation in public life are associated with lower levels of corruption (Taiye, 2008). This assertion is

corroborated by the World Bank report (2012) that society is less corrupt and has high economic development when there is more equality between men and women (Campbell & Frederick, 2005). With reference to a study carried out by Cheng (2014), who opines that women leaders are less corrupt than their male counterparts, the UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) (2020a) aver that the prevalence of bribery amongst men is 35.2%, compared with 23.9% amongst women. Although the prevalence of bribery decreased for both sexes from 2016 to 2019, the decrease was more marked amongst women than amongst men. This suggests that women may be more receptive to anti-corruption policies and awareness campaigns. There are various reasons why gender differences exist in bribe-paying. One could be related to the different role played by men and women within the household. The data suggest that the disproportionate exposure of men to bribery may be the result of the bribery transactions carried out on behalf of the household or other family members.

Several studies conducted support the above argument of gender dimension to the incidences of corruption. For instance, in a study by the UNODC (2020b) titled *Gender and Corruption in Nigeria*, it was revealed that in Nigeria, male public officials are 36% more likely than female public officials to make a direct bribe request, whereas female public officials are much more likely to receive an unsolicited bribe. While female officers are significantly less involved in corrupt practices than their male colleagues, this difference could be partially because of the fact that women are under-represented in decision-making positions where they can engage in such activities. In addition, the study revealed that male police officers are five times more likely to take a bribe than their female colleagues. More so, the study revealed that the differences are less marked for doctors and teachers or lecturers (the two public sector occupations with the largest share of women): where male teachers or lecturers are only 1½ times more likely to take a bribe than their female colleagues; male doctors are twice as likely to do so. The prevalence of bribery in relation to these occupations is also amongst the lowest in the public sector.

Tor and Terkula (2011) opine that the system of corruption that has infiltrated the Nigerian system has practically put women on edge and everything seems to be working against them in favour of men. Women generally appear to have little or no financial backing. They are, by nature, sympathetic, caring and think largely towards homebuilding, and hence, aspiring for public offices to enrich themselves is very rare. However, men who are virtually blank, have little sympathy for the suffering masses, in the event that they are in charge of public coffers, steal massively to build their political empires in the future. This scenario is evident in the many cases

of corruption scandals witnessed in Nigeria amongst top bureaucrats and politicians in recent times. In a related development, the study by Jha and Sarangi (2018), titled *Women and corruption: what positions must they hold to make a difference?* revealed a strong correlation between higher levels of women's political participation and lower levels of corruption.

Although, the study by the UNODC (2020b) and Tor and Terkula (2011) reflect the situation in Nigeria, corruption and gender issues are global phenomena, hence the plethora of other studies in this regard. For instance, the study by Stensöta et al. (2015) titled *Gender and Corruption: The Mediating Power of Institutional Logics* reveals that when analysing European Commission data from 30 European countries, there is no relationship between the number of women in public administration and levels of corruption; however, in the same study they do find that the higher the number of women in parliament, the lower the perceived level of corruption. A recent study by Bauhr and Charron (2021) titled *Will Women Executives Reduce Corruption? Marginalization and Network Inclusion*, shows that women, when they are newly elected as mayors, reduce corruption risks; however, when they are re-elected, the effect disappears. What these studies clearly show is that the "link between women's representation and lower-level corruption is context-dependent, and the effects of women representatives may therefore differ depending on the positions and platforms that women gain access to, and thereby potentially also vary over time.

Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer (2017) have demonstrated through the use of cross-sectional data that females elected into assemblies and parliaments have reduced incidences of corruption. More so, Dumont (2017) undertook a comparative study of women's participation in government using data from Rwanda and Bolivia. These two countries' choice arose from the fact that both countries have similar institutions with over 30% of female representation in the Lower House and have different levels of corruption. The study utilised quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques to show that corruption had significantly reduced when women were integrated into governance. The study demonstrated that increasing female participation in politics could reduce corruption, strengthen democratic governance, and institutionalise accountability.

Debski and Jetter (2015) examined the relationship between gender and corruption while controlling for country-specific heterogeneity using a panel framework. While applying a no-country-fixed panel effect, the study confirmed that women's involvement in governance reduces corruption. In specific terms, the study revealed that an increase in female participation in the employee workforce leads to a reduction in the level of corruption by 2½ index points. Swamy et al. (2020), cited in Riman et al.

(2023), examined the effect of women's representation in parliament on corruption using a micro-data set from 350 selected firms in Georgia. The study concluded that countries with cultural and religious bias have lower women's representation in parliaments, hence increases the probability of corruption and furthermore, corruption is less severe where women hold a larger share of parliamentary seats and senior positions in the government bureaucracy. The recent study by Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer (2017) titled *Women's Representation, Accountability and Corruption in Democracies* reveals that the empirical relationship between greater women's representation and lower perceived corruption will be strongest in democracies with high electoral accountability, specifically: (1) where corruption is not the norm, (2) where press freedom is respected, (3) in parliamentary systems and (4) under personalistic electoral rules.

Conversely, there are opposing views to the above submissions criticising the gender-responsive arguments as an antidote against corruption. One of such is Goetz (2003), who questioned the notion that women in governance will result in lower levels of corruption. Similarly, Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer (2017) opine that increasing the number of women in parliament has not been found to have a consistent effect on corruption. Alhassan-Alolo's (2007) study titled *Gender and Corruption: Testing the New Consensus*, added that male and female public servants in Ghana have similar attitudes towards corruption and are equally likely to engage in it. More so, Alatas et al. (2009), in their study *Gender, Culture, and Corruption: Insights from an Experimental Analysis*, came to similar conclusions that in India and Indonesia, there are no significant gender differences in attitudes towards corruption. Similarly, Vijayalakshmi's (2015) study on *Rent-Seeking and Gender in Local Governance* found that there is no difference in rent-seeking attitudes or actual levels of corruption between male and female elected representatives in India.

Bauhr et al. (2019) investigated the effect of women's representation in parliament in reducing petty and grand corruption using sub-national-level data for up to 182 regions in 20 European Union countries and found that the inclusion of women in locally elected assemblies is strongly negatively associated with the prevalence of both petty and grand forms of corruption. That is, there is no significant relationship between the number of women in parliament and lower levels of corruption. The study however, observed that women who seek political offices do so for two reasons: (a) the improvement of public service delivery, particularly the care-oriented services that benefit traditionally female-oriented sectors, such as education and healthcare, and (b) the breakup of male-dominated clienteles' networks, but not necessarily to reduce the incidences of corruption. In this regard, Esarey and Chirillo,

cited in Merkle (2022), revealed that this was confirmed in a 2013 study that showed that women's participation only affected corruption levels when the country already had strong political institutions. On a similar note, Alhassan-Alolo (2007) added that the reason for gender differential in corruption is that women might simply have less access to corrupt opportunities. Other researchers hold that women have less access to corrupt opportunities as they are excluded from many positions of power and networks. When more women gain access to political office, they can break up existing networks, which leads to reductions in corruption or at the same time, it might be the case that even with higher numbers of women representatives, the corrupt networks continue to exist, or include more women in those networks once they have achieved positions of power (Esarey & Schwindt-Bayer, 2017).

Even though there are back-and-forth arguments on whether or not increasing women's participation in governance helps to lower the incidences of corruption, what is certain is that the incidences of corruption affect the number of women elected or appointed to political positions. For instance, a study by Norris (2019) titled *Silver or lead? Why violence and corruption limit women's representation*, confirms that high levels of political corruption and political violence lead to a lower number of women elected to parliament. She finds that where corruption is common, women constitute roughly 3.9% of the legislatures, while when no corruption is present, the number of women in parliament rise to 13.6%. Many researchers find that electoral systems have an impact on the political participation of women (Matland & Brown, 1992; Norris, 2019) and corruption can be an additional barrier for women seeking to actually run for and be elected into public office, when, for example, illicit funds are used in elections (Norris, 2019).

Merkle's 2022 study titled *Anti-corruption and gender: the role of women's political participation* revealed that Kenya reflects similar problems with high levels of corruption and low levels of women's political participation. The study shows that corruption in the country not only hinders the participation of women, but also that of young people. Male-dominated patronage networks still dominate the political sphere, and while the number of women in politics has slowly been increasing, they seem not to have succeeded in breaking up these networks, as parties often include opportunistic women and exclude those who want to bring about change. The results of the studies by Dollar et al. (2001) and Swamy et al. (2001) reveal a similar finding: that the higher numbers of women in national parliaments seem to be linked to lower levels of corruption, and that there is a correlation between women's political participation and corruption.

Supporting the foregoing argument, Bauhr et al. (2019), in their study *Exclusion or Interests? Why Females in Elected Office Reduce Petty and Grand*

*Corruption*, corroborated the findings that analysing data from different parts of the world has found that higher levels of female representation in political leadership positions are linked to lower levels of both types of corruption. In an earlier study by Norris (1993), titled *Conclusions: Comparing Legislative Recruitment*, she opined that political parties are considered to be gatekeepers for women politicians and party structures play an important role in deciding women's chances for office. Kunovich and Paxton (2005) argue that women have to pass two filters to become public officials: first, they must be selected to run by the parties and then they must be favoured by the electorate. For the selection within the parties, however, research shows that corruption can severely hinder women's access to political office.

From the foregoing, Merkle (2022) maintains that the cross-country outlook also shows a link between women's representation and corruption. For instance, over the last decades a clear pattern occurred, indicating that there is a strong link between corruption and the political participation of women, even though the link might not always be straightforward. Taking a closer look at the data in Ukraine shows that the two large anticorruption elections have also resulted in higher numbers of women MPs (members of parliament). In particular, the 2019 election, which was won largely on an anti-corruption platform, has almost doubled the number of women in parliament. While it still remains to be seen if the increased number of women leads to lower levels of corruption, when looking at the current situation, certain elements can be highlighted that influence the role that women play in anti-corruption. He added that Indonesia showcased a similar scenario: "women's participation in politics is low, while corruption is continuing to be a major problem in Indonesia. This is in line with the existing research which shows that higher levels of women's participation are clearly linked to lower levels of corruption". Berenschot (2018) adds that Indonesia is dominated by rent-seeking patronage networks.

Studies within Nigeria confirm the findings from the cross-country experience. For instance, the study by Riman et al. (2023) titled *Does women participation in governance reduce corruption and income inequality? Empirical investigation from Nigeria*. The study observed that corruption harmed governance efficiency given the limited participation of women in parliament. The study further observed that increasing women's participation in governance has the remote effect of reducing the level of corruption in Nigeria as well as reducing income disparity in the economy. The study concludes that increasing women's participation in parliament should not only be encouraged for the sake of obtaining gender equality in parliament but because such participation has positive externalities such as

enhancing governance efficiency, increasing per capita income, and reducing the negative impact of corruption on the economy.

The foregoing arguments align to the fact that corruption knows no gender and often perpetuated by both genders. Regarding the female gender, Okonkwo (2016) makes a very apt submission that for the fact that corruption is so endemic, the women who are elected are often subjected to the country's patronage system. Resulting from this, the election of women does not, in most cases, lead to any substantive representation (seeking to weigh the influence of women in elected office against their roles according to their legitimacy and authority) for women. He documents numerous examples of corruption amongst female politicians, including 'first ladies project syndrome', whereby expensive projects led by presidents' wives have failed, often because of misappropriate procurement scams or embezzlement.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study is anchored on the Intersectionality Theory developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, published in 1989 (Crenshaw, 1989). The main assumptions of the Intersectionality Theory include:

1. Intersectionality recognises that individuals have multiple social identities, such as gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and more. These identities intersect and interact to shape a person's experiences and opportunities.
2. The theory posits that different forms of oppression (such as sexism, racism, homophobia, amongst others) do not operate independently; rather, they intersect and compound, leading to unique and multifaceted experiences of discrimination and disadvantage. Intersectionality highlights how some aspects of an individual's identity may be highly visible and subject to discrimination (for example, being a woman of colour), while other aspects may be invisible or less salient in certain contexts.
3. It acknowledges that the experiences of individuals at the intersections of multiple identities may differ significantly from those who do not share the same intersecting identities. For example, the experiences of a black woman may differ from those of a white woman or a black man. Intersectionality Theory is rooted in the pursuit of social justice. It emphasises the need to recognise and address the structural and systemic inequalities that result from intersecting forms of discrimination.
4. Moreover, Intersectionality has practical implications for advocacy, policymaking, and social change. It calls for policies and interventions

that take into account the complexity of individuals' identities and experiences to create more equitable and inclusive societies.

Intersectionality Theory is highly relevant in explaining gender and politics in Nigeria. Nigeria, like many other countries, is marked by diverse social identities, cultures, and inequalities, and intersectionality provides a valuable framework to understand how these intersecting factors shape the experiences of women in politics. Nigeria is characterised by a diverse population with multiple ethnic groups and religious affiliations. Intersectionality theory recognises that women from different ethnic and religious backgrounds may face distinct forms of discrimination and varying opportunities in politics (Vasquez, 2016).

Therefore, recognising the intersectionality of identities is crucial for formulating effective policies and interventions. Policies that take into account the multifaceted identities of women in Nigeria can be more targeted and responsive to their specific needs and challenges (Hankivsky et al., 2014). In application, Intersectionality Theory helps shed light on both the challenges and opportunities for women's political engagement. It acknowledges that women's experiences in politics are not uniform and that strategies for advancing gender equality in politics must consider these variations (Nash, 2008). This is because Nigeria's political landscape is characterised by complex power dynamics influenced by ethnicity, religion, and gender. Intersectionality Theory offers insights into how these dynamics interact and affect women's ability to access political power and influence (Hancock, 2016).

Intersectionality Theory therefore, examines how various social identities (such as gender, race, class, religion, corruption) intersect and create unique experiences of oppression and privilege against women and undermine their effective participation in governance, especially the compounded impact of religion and corruption on women, particularly those who belong to other marginalised groups and how multiple forms of discrimination interact to further disadvantage women in the context of political and social representation. This theoretical framework provides a comprehensive lens through which to examine the complex interplay between religion, corruption, and women's representation. By applying these theories, researchers and policymakers can better understand the barriers to women's participation and develop more effective strategies to promote gender equality.

## Methodology

This study relied on the documentary design using secondary data since there are a great deal of data resources and data sets available to address the concerns of this research. The following two guidelines are therefore adopted in accordance with the submission of Hagen-Zanker and Mallett (2013):

1. a literature search; and
2. capturing the grey literature, which involved hand-searching various pre-selected institutional websites.

## Data presentation and analysis

**Table 22:** World Bank 2019 selected countries corruption and governance index

Countries	Corruption index	Women in governance	Governance effectiveness	Innovation	Economic decline
<b>Advanced-income countries</b>					
Denmark	87	39.11	1.87	58.40	1.60
Norway	84	40.83	1.89	51.90	1.90
Finland	86	47	1.98	59.8	2.90
Sweden	85	47.28	1.83	63.70	1.50
<b>Low-income countries</b>					
Botswana	61	9.53	0.33	25.40	5.80
Ghana	41	13.09	-0.21	25.30	5.7
Albania	35	29.51	0.11	30.30	6.0
Algeria	35	25.76	-0.44	24.0	6.30
Bangladesh	26	20.63	-0.75	23.3	6.10
Nigeria	26	3.38	-0.12	23.90	7.80

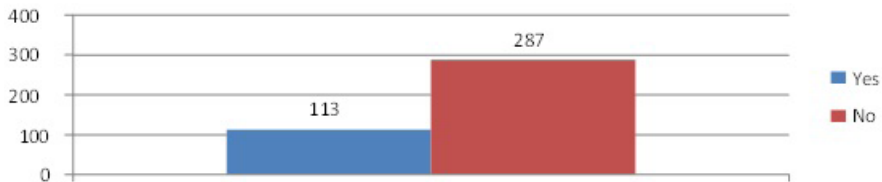
Source: World Bank (2019)

The data in Table 22 reveals the advanced- and low-income countries' corruption and governance index. It shows that Sweden, which is rated as one of the countries with the lowest record of corruption, has 47.28% of women's participation in governance. A further review showed that Sweden has a governance rating of 1.83 and an innovation rate of 63.7%. The possibility of facing severe economic decline is placed at 1.50%. Finland came in close succession to Sweden with a corruption index of 85 and 47% level of women's governance involvement. Finland has a governance efficiency level of 1.98 and

an innovation level of 59.8%. Given the high level of women's participation in governance, Finland has a possibility of 2.9% minimal economic decline.

Conversely, Nigeria presented a gloomy statistic with 3.38% of women's involvement in governance. This low level of participation of women in governance, gives Nigeria a negative value of -0.12 in governance efficiency, with the possibility of experiencing economic decline placed at 7.80%. Ghana seems to have a better outlook than Nigeria with 9.52% women's involvement in governance. With this comparable high level of participation of women in governance, Ghana has a positive value of 0.33 in governance efficiency, with the possibility of experiencing a comparable minimal economic decline of 5.80%. Some of the significant points here are that countries (Sweden, Finland, Norway) with increased women's governance involvement have a high governance efficiency level and a low possibility of economic decline. On the contrary, countries with low participation of women in governance experience a low rate of governance efficiency and a high possibility of experiencing economic decline.

In sum, the above statistics comparatively indicate that Nigeria has a negative value of -1.02 for governance effectiveness. This is the highest amongst the selected low-income countries studied. This figure could be interpreted as indicating that the Nigerian public service is downright perverse, with politicians who wholesomely and collaboratively exert corrupt practices in governance.



**Figure 7:** Perception of respondents on whether their religion allows for women's participation in politics

Source: Adopted from the study of Amusan et al. (2017)

An analysis of Table 22 shows that 28.3% of all the respondents believed that their religion and its principles do not expressly prohibit women from participating in politics, while 71.7% of the respondents believed that religion and its principles prohibit women's participation in partisan politics. Thus, the results highlight that a larger percentage of the respondents are of the opinion that religious teaching, principles and values restrict women's participation in politics.

## Discussion of findings

From the analysis above, the finding shows that:

1. Corruption and its effects on women's representation can be seen from two perspectives. One, is the perspective that corruption has negatively affected the number of women holding elected positions, as the cost of running for election is exorbitant, with only male candidates having access to corrupt funds and buying their way through. Secondly, increasing representation of women in elected and public offices helps to lower the rate of corruption in a country. This is confirmed by Merkle (2022), that increasing the number of women in political office has the potential impact on reducing corruption at national, regional and local levels.
2. Quotas can be an important tool to increase the number of women, but for anti-corruption initiatives, women who are not part of existing clientelist networks must benefit from these quotas. This is in line with the submission of Kelly (2019) that the reasons easily adduced for low women's representation are lack of effective government action, low level of female employment and education, sexist attitude, a corrupt and patronage-based political system, and violence at elections
3. Thus, the results highlight that a larger percentage of the respondents are of the opinion that religious teaching, principles and values restrict women's participation in politics. This is even as some believed that religious provisions do not specifically prohibit women's political participation; however, some adherents of the major religion often misapplied the provisions of their scripture to undermine the effectiveness of women's under-representation. This is in accordance with the submission of Akindele & Dunmade (2020) that higher levels of religiosity in Nigeria tend to magnify gender inequality; however, every religious doctrine has a slightly different attitude towards the public participation of women
4. Corruption and religious inclinations and practices, though, undermine women's effective participation in politics, it also responsible for poor governance and slow development in the country; hence, the findings of Esarey & Schwindt-Bayer (2017) that increasing female participation in politics could reduce corruption, strengthen democratic governance, and institutionalise accountability as well as promote development.

## Conclusion

The study explores the intricate relationship between corruption, religion, good governance and women's representation in Nigeria. It is the contention

of this study that women's representation in governance is an element of good governance that is capable of addressing the incidences of corruption, religious bottlenecks and promotes sustainable development. The study therefore concludes that women's participation in governance should be promoted to engender inclusive democracy, enhance governance efficiency, reducing the negative impact of corruption and religious challenges affecting inclusive governance.

## **Recommendations**

From the findings, the following are recommended in promoting better women's representation by reducing the negative influence of corruption and religious practices undermining their effective participation:

1. Promote a sensitisation and advocacy campaign aimed at promoting religious interpretations and teachings that support gender equality. This is in addition to raising awareness about the detrimental effects of corruption on women's representation to educate voters about the importance of women's participation in politics.
2. Stakeholders, especially women's organisations and government, should create and expand support networks for women in politics, including mentoring programmes to help them navigate political challenges and also collaborate with international organisations and partners to share best practices and resources for advancing gender equality in politics.
3. Government should, through legislation, ensure that political parties implement internal reforms that will promote gender equality, such as inclusive candidate selection processes and holding of leadership positions within the party structure.
4. Policymakers should ensure policy interventions by implementing gender quotas and other affirmative action policies to ensure women's representation in leadership roles. This will also entail the strengthening of anti-corruption frameworks to equalise opportunities for women.
5. Building on the fact that female public officials have a lower propensity to solicit bribes than their male colleagues, arrangements should be explored for officials of both sexes to work jointly in conducting key assignments. For example, the improvement of the gender balance should be promoted amongst law-enforcement teams, which are particularly prone to soliciting bribes.

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