


Chapter 13

Constraints to Women's Participation in the Electoral Activities in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: What it means for Democratic Consolidation

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Abstract

Women's engagement in electoral activities is a critical component of every nation's democratic development. This study investigates the various limitations that prevent women from actively participating in election processes in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It sheds light on the essential consequences of these limits for the country's larger goal of democratic consolidation. The theoretical underpinning of analysis was Social Capital Theory, which was used to investigate how social networks and ties affect individuals' political engagement. It was used to examine how much access women have to political networks and how this affects their electoral participation. Data were mostly gathered from secondary sources before being submitted to qualitative content analysis and used to assess and develop conclusions about the findings. It was shown that Nigeria's electoral system creates significant barriers for women, including concerns with campaign financing, political party structures, and electoral violence. Deeply rooted patriarchal norms and practices frequently marginalise women, making it difficult for them to negotiate the political scene. Furthermore, socioeconomic barriers such as inadequate access to education and economic resources hinder women's political participation and achievement. To address these constraints, the study proposes a multi-pronged approach that includes legal reforms to promote gender equality, targeted efforts to improve women's political education and leadership skills, and the creation of a supportive environment that discourages gender-based violence and discrimination. Nigeria may make considerable gains towards building a

stronger and more consolidated democracy by removing these barriers and encouraging women's active engagement.

Keywords: Democratic Consolidation, Election, Electoral Process, Participation, Women

Introduction

Nigeria has made considerable progress in its democratic path since the establishment of the Fourth Republic in 1999. However, one conspicuous issue persists: women's under-representation in electoral activity. This under-representation not only undermines gender equality principles, but it also has serious ramifications for the country's democratic consolidation. According to Isma'ila (2016) and Fayemi (2000), one of the consequences of 'the Cold War era' between the United States and the Soviet Union was the widespread expansion of democratic governance in numerous African countries, including Nigeria. Citizens' political participation, openness, accountability, respect for human rights, the rule of law, and a government founded on a democratic ethos are all hallmarks of democratic governance.

Women's political representation has increased dramatically over the past 20 years, with all regions making significant strides towards the target of 30% women's representation in decision-making (IPU, 2015). The average proportion of women in the upper house has doubled globally over that time. While Nigeria and other African nations have made relatively modest advancements in women's political representation, some have made significant strides. Nigeria has had seven general elections since its restoration to civil government in 1999 (1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023), with a mixed record of women's political representation. In some of these elections, Nigeria has experienced a rise in the number of women elected to political office, although overall development has been modest. However, there is still a long way to go before gender parity is achieved in Nigeria's decision-making bodies.

The return to democratic rule in 1999 in Nigeria, heralding the Fourth Republic, aroused considerable euphoria amongst Nigerians. Nigerians perceived the return as a big relief and the end of the country's dictatorial military government. They regarded it as a chance to actively participate in state affairs, which resulted in new political programmes and a successful government (Yusuf, 2018). Despite individuals' expectations surrounding Nigeria's political representation, issues and critiques have persisted. Many Nigerians believe that the country's political representation is still plagued by corruption, nepotism, and a lack of accountability. Furthermore, some believe that political elites are detached from ordinary people's struggles, leading

to rising dissatisfaction with the democratic system. These issues underline the importance of ongoing efforts to develop democratic institutions and provide equal opportunities for meaningful involvement in government for all individuals, especially the women. Given that women appear to be playing a larger role in Nigeria's socioeconomic and cultural landscape, it is surprising that there has not been more advancement in women's political representation. It was anticipated that as women's roles in society grow, so will their participation in politics.

In general, Nigeria appears to have a policy environment that promotes gender parity. To begin with, the bulk of international agreements regarding gender impartiality and women's empowerment have been ratified by the Nigerian government. Second, the nation's successive governments have created a dynamic institutional framework for the creation and application of gender policies. This framework, which is coordinated by the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs, consists of desk officers for each industry as well as Women Affairs Officers in each government ministry. Third, there appears to be a general understanding of gender issues, since both government and non-governmental groups prioritise gender mainstreaming in their work (Nkwachukwu et al., 2018). Even if the prospects for enhanced female representation in governance in Nigeria appear encouraging, a glance at the data on the political representation of women in Nigeria reveals that the degree of female representation in political leadership has not improved over the past ten years.

Despite formal representation being enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution, women continue to be under-represented in elective offices and political leadership positions, two decades after the country's last military dictatorship. The durability of this ideology after five election cycles necessitates a consideration of the socio-cultural and institutional infrastructure that supports it, as well as the techniques used by 'outliers' to negotiate access to political space. We focus on this group of Nigerians because the low percentage of women's representation in appointive and elective offices or positions calls into question a core principle shared by all democracies: the inclusion of 'women as equal participants in decision-making that affects their lives and communities is both a rights issue and an issue of democratic integrity' (National Democratic Institute, 2021). Understanding the barriers faced by women in accessing political space is crucial for promoting gender equality and strengthening democratic processes. By examining the experiences of Nigerian women in politics, we can identify the specific challenges that they encounter and develop targeted strategies to address them. Additionally, exploring the tactics employed by those who have successfully navigated these obstacles can provide valuable

insights and inspire other women to actively engage in political participation. This motive gave rise to this study to examine the constraints on women's participation in electoral activities in Nigeria's Fourth Republic and what it means for democratic consolidation.

The study is structured in the following way to accomplish the aforementioned goal: introduction, conceptual clarifications, theoretical framework, women's participation in politics, issues that prevent women from participating in electoral activities, conclusion, and recommendations.

Women's participation conceptualised

Many studies have been conducted to better understand the marginalisation of women in political systems, some of which have been spearheaded by the Nigerian government. In 1986, for example, the General Ibrahim Babangida Administration established a Political Bureau to conduct a comprehensive study of Nigeria's political and socioeconomic systems, which recognised a gender imbalance. 'Full involvement of women in politics is one strategy of safeguarding women's interests in society,' it stated (Abdullah, 1993).

Existing scholarship on Nigerian politics has constantly highlighted women's marginalisation while identifying fundamental barriers to their political participation. Previous research has examined how the interplay of socioeconomic and cultural norms places women on the political periphery (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010; Okoosi-Simbine, 2012; Pogason, 2012). In addition to these general problems, there are specific restrictions, such as gender-based violence (Agbalajobi, 2021). Ette (2017) contends that in a study of media visibility of frontline female politicians during the 2015 electoral cycle, the media participated in systemic reinforcement of patriarchal framing of politics, impeding women's engagement. However, Omojola and Morah (2014) ascribe media invisibility to news consumption patterns. They claim that women's issues do not 'fit in the logic of media commercialism, which prioritizes profit and access to those with the means of purchase, who are largely men'. To highlight the invisibility of female politicians in the media, most research on media portrayal of women echo the declaration of symbolic 'annihilation' of women in the news (Tuchman et al., 1978). Other specific issues include: low literacy rates (Orisadare, 2019), which limit women's awareness of their political and democratic rights; the failure of women's organisations to advocate for women's emancipation and liberation (Abdullah, 1993); and political violence (Okoosi-Simbine, 2012).

Though not predominant breadwinners, women play a role as the stewards of society's social, cultural, and fundamental values and are often best suited to bring about lasting change. In fact, full community

development is impossible without their exceptional cooperation and effective participation (Omoruyi et al., as cited in Fiemotongha & Isaac, 2020). Despite the fact that women's participation and contributions to the political and socioeconomic growth of any democratic state are immeasurable, they have not yet achieved equality in Nigeria's politics and national life. Nigerian women have showed skill in managing public affairs and holding leadership roles, even though they have traditionally been homemakers and guardians of family values.

According to Fasugba, cited in Fiemotongha and Isaac (2020), women have kept up competition with men in all areas of human effort ever since they became aware of their rights, even though many women participate in activities and vocations that were formerly regarded to be reserved for men. Women are allowed to participate actively in politics in Nigeria, and some have done so over the years, but their exclusion has become institutionalised and woven into the fabric of the patriarchal political apparatus. This masculinist viewpoint shapes public perceptions of politics in ways that continue to favour men. As a result, men have easy access to public space, whereas women are considered to belong to the domestic realm (Dowler & Sharp, 2001; Pogoson, 2012). In other words, a masculine blueprint continues to shape 'what it means to be a politician, privileging men and offering them greater authority and privilege, particularly during the electoral process' (Williams, 2020). This gender bias in politics has significant consequences for women's representation and participation in decision-making processes. It perpetuates a cycle where women are often marginalised and face barriers when it comes to entering the political arena. Efforts to challenge and dismantle this masculine blueprint are crucial in order to achieve true gender equality in politics.

The issue of women's under-representation in politics is not specific to Nigeria or poor countries in general. Many mature democracies, including the United States, are still grappling with this issue (Ramos & Da Silva, 2020). However, developing countries' socio-cultural environments and entrenched patriarchal institutions aggravate the situation to a greater extent than Western countries. Contrary to popular belief, African women appear to be somewhat politically powerful, at least in a few nations (Tamale, 2000). This empowerment can be linked to a variety of causes, including the adoption of affirmative action measures and quotas designed to expand women's political representation. Furthermore, grassroots movements and women-led organisations have been critical in pushing for gender equality and defying cultural conventions. Despite these advances, genuine gender equity in politics remains a long way off, both in Africa and globally.

Electoral process

Election has been defined as the act or power of choosing a person to hold a position of authority. Today, Nigeria has a multi-party system, which means that there are approximately 91 registered political parties in Nigeria (INEC, 2019). According to the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) published list of candidates, a total of 15,309 persons contested for seats at the national and state levels in 2023, including 14,043 (91.7%) males and 1,266 (8.3%) females. There were 18 presidential candidates, 1,101 Senatorial candidates, 3,122 House of Representatives candidates, 837 gubernatorial candidates, and 10,231 State Houses of Assembly candidates (INEC, 2023). As Nachana'a et al. (2014) claim that the only institutionalised procedure that enables members of society to select office holders is elections. The institutionalised framework for choosing representatives in a fair and competitive election is provided by the electoral process.

Idike (2014) views the election process as a complex process that includes both desirable goals and unfavourable results, particularly in developing democracies where general elections are frequently tainted by culturally specific electoral malpractices. These malpractices can range from voter intimidation and bribery to ballot stuffing and manipulation of results. Despite these challenges, Idike argues that it is crucial for developing democracies to continuously strive towards improving their election processes in order to strengthen democratic institutions and ensure fair representation of the people's will.

As stated by Ademowo (2016) there are three steps to the election process. These include:

Pre-Election Phase: This phase includes delineation, voter registration, political party registration, voter education, and campaign processes, all of which are finished before election day.

Election Phase: This covers the events that happen on election day itself. They consist of moving election materials, monitoring and observing the election, voting, and counting the votes.

The Post-Election Phase: begins after the polls shut on election day and includes all subsequent actions. They consist of results announcements and, in some places, post-election controversies.

Democratic consolidation

Perhaps operationalising the idea of democracy itself is the best place to start when elaborating on the concept of democratic consolidation. Democracy in this study refers to a form of governance that is oriented on the needs of

the populace and includes regular elections where the integrity of the voting process is strictly upheld. The implication of this position is that democracy is nourished by transparency and accountability in public administration, which not only encourages the electorate to participate in the selection of their representatives but also allows for mass participation (Yagboyaju, 2013). This mass participation is essential for democratic consolidation because it ensures that the government remains attentive to the people's interests and desires. Furthermore, transparency and accountability in government help to combat corruption and abuse of power, while also establishing trust between the government and its population.

Therefore, democratic consolidation is about maintaining the current regime and viewing the major political institutions as the only framework for political contestation and adherence to the democratic rules of the game (Ogundiya, cited in Akubo & Yakubu, 2014). As explained by Okeke (2015), democracy strengthens when it protects individual liberties and the integrity of elections. Therefore, democracy is both a form of government and a means of self-defence. It is a strategy for preventing political thugs from seizing the people's power. Democracy protects people's hopes from invasion by various intruders. It ensures that the will of the majority is respected and provides a platform for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Additionally, democracy promotes transparency and accountability, as elected leaders are held responsible for their actions and decisions.

According to Ademola (2011), the consolidation of democracy entails a transition from totalitarian to democratic regimes, which is essential for the establishment of stable institutions and a long-lasting democracy. According to this scholar, the transition from an authoritarian to a democratic system of governance is known as democratic consolidation. In the words of Ovwasa and Abdullahi (2017), democratic consolidation entails more than just making the switch from a totalitarian to a democratic government. Additionally, it entails ensuring that elections are trustworthy, free and fair, as well as that incumbent political leaders accept election outcomes and peacefully hand over power to the opposition when they lose them. This process also involves establishing strong institutions and mechanisms that safeguard the rule of law, protect human rights, and promote transparency and accountability in governance. Furthermore, democratic consolidation requires active citizen participation and engagement in political processes to ensure a vibrant civil society that can hold the government accountable for its actions.

Theoretical framework

The study applied Social Capital Theory as its theoretical foundation of analysis to examine the constraint to women's participation in the electoral activities in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory is a sociological concept that emphasises the value and significance of social networks and ties in numerous facets of life, such as social, economic, and political spheres. Scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam popularised it, and it has received major attention in sociology, economics, and political science. According to Social Capital Theory, the social relationships and networks that individuals and communities develop have concrete benefits and can be viewed as a type of capital, akin to financial or human capital. The importance of social capital in economic advancement and sustainable development has been discovered by researchers (Putnam, 1993; Knack & Keefer, 1997; Sabatini, 2006).

According to the main assumption of Social Capital Theory, social relationships and networks have intrinsic value and can be a valuable resource for individuals and communities. To put it another way, Social Capital Theory maintains that the bonds, connections, and trust that people form within their social networks can be equally as important as other types of capital, such as financial or human capital, in achieving individual and collective goals.

Most economic behaviours, according to Granovetter (1985), are anchored in social networks. Social capital is important for improving access to information, social cohesion, civic engagement, reducing opportunistic behaviour, increasing political participation, increasing government responsiveness and efficiency, lowering transaction costs, providing insurance against risk and uncertainty, and resolving collective action problems (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1993; Fukuyama, 1995). Furthermore, social capital has been discovered to be critical in economic development and progress. According to studies, countries with higher levels of social capital have stronger economies because trust and collaboration amongst individuals and institutions enhance trade, investment, and innovation. Social Capital Theory emphasises the relevance of social networks in people's lives. Because of established gender stereotypes and prejudice, women commonly encounter barriers to participating in electoral activities. Women with strong social networks, particularly those connected to important political actors or women's groups, may find it easier to overcome these barriers. Women

can profit from social capital by receiving the contacts and help they need to navigate the complex political landscape.

Social Capital Theory can help women overcome difficulties in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, where gender discrepancies in political participation persist. Women may improve their political participation and contribute to democratic consolidation through building and utilising social networks, fostering trust, and supporting collective action. Furthermore, social capital can serve to influence societal norms in favour of more inclusive and supportive political engagement for women.

Women's participation in electoral activities

Women have always been under-represented in political party positions in Nigeria, whether elected or appointed. Following the Fourth World Conference on Women's Beijing Declaration (UN, 1995), governmental and non-governmental organisations attempted to increase female political participation. Unfortunately, the problem of under-representation persists (Ibizugbe, 2023). Initiatives such as quotas for women's representation in political parties and leadership positions have been used to increase female participation in politics. Despite these attempts, progress has been modest, emphasising the need for additional systemic changes to address the underlying causes of gender disparity in Nigerian politics.

The results of the general elections held on 25 February 2023 have brought to light Nigeria's inability to implement a number of treaties and laws it signed to ensure women's involvement in politics. In the February elections, just 3 of the 92 women who competed for the Senate were elected, and only 15 of the 286 candidates for House of Representatives seats were declared winners, as numerous election petition cases were still ongoing at the electoral tribunals at the time this piece was being written. It is surprising that there has not been much progress made in the representation of women in politics given that their significance in Nigeria's socioeconomic and cultural environment looks to be expanding. The assumption was that as women's influence in society increased, so would their involvement in politics. Nigeria appears to be moving in the wrong direction despite global appeals to boost women's participation in public life. In contrast to 2,665 men (616 senators and 2,041 representatives), just 157 women, 39 senate members, and 119 of the 469 members of the chamber were elected (Ibizugbe, 2023).

According to information from the INEC, 1,552 women contested in the general elections of 2023 in Nigeria (INEC, 2023). The presidency (president / vice-president), governorship / deputy governorship, senate,

house of representatives, and state houses of assembly are a few of the available positions. The list of candidates provided by INEC was used to compile the data. Few Nigerian women participated in politics, as history has demonstrated (Tolu-Kolawole et al., 2022). Further inquiry revealed that 288 women, or 8.35% of the 1,101 Senate candidates, also contested for seats in the House of Representatives, out of a total of 3,122 candidates. An additional state-by-state review of Nigeria's 36 states, including the Federal Capital Territory, reveals that five did not field a single woman as a candidate for the Senate and one did not do so for the House of Representatives.

Smaller political parties appear to have fewer entry hurdles for women in general. According to the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID), 96% of women candidates for federal seats in the 2019 elections came from tiny parties (Nwankwor & Nkereuwem, 2019). Women represented 11% of candidates from small parties on average in the 2023 cycle, with many small parties performing much better than others in terms of women's representation. For major offices such as President, Senate, and House of Representatives, the gender gap was substantially larger in dominant parties (APC and PDP) than in newer or smaller parties (Nkereuwem, 2023). Subnational elections had a smaller gender disparity than national elections, especially for tiny parties. The high expense of obtaining nomination forms for various posts is a significant barrier for women. This is particularly true for larger gatherings. Many political parties claim to make it easier for women to enter the first round by lowering entry restrictions through nomination fee reduction or elimination (Opara, 2023). Despite these initiatives, women continue to face considerable financial barriers when it comes to engaging in politics. Furthermore, the cost of mounting a campaign and engaging in outreach efforts contributes to the gender gap in political representation.

Women's representation varies across Nigeria's six regions, or geopolitical zones, with Southern states far outperforming Northern states. Women made up 9% of the over 4,200 candidates running for federal legislative posts in 2023, representing all eighteen parties. This proportion of representation varied by location and election type. The North West was the worst-performing region for female candidacy, with women constituting only 3% of all candidates competing for seats in the National Assembly. The South East had the greatest proportion of female candidates for federal legislative offices, at 13% (Nkereuwem, 2023). These regional differences in female candidacy underline the importance of focused initiatives to boost female presence in politics, notably in the North West region. It is critical to address the underlying causes of this disparity and to encourage equitable chances for women to participate in politics.

Constraints hindering women's participation in electoral activities

Women in Nigeria have major and specific hurdles throughout the voting cycle, with high attrition rates. In general, studies of election outcomes for female candidates frequently concentrate on the end of the cycle. However, different stages of the political cycle provide unique hurdles for female candidates. As a result, the concerns revealed towards the cycle's end sometimes conflate phase-specific issues, making intervention possibilities harder to detect. Some of the variables directly responsible for some of these challenges are as follows:

Violence: Nigerian elections are a battle of strength, guts, and survival of the fittest. In light of the aforementioned, women frequently find it difficult to negotiate Nigerian politics' turbulent waters. The political parties' midnight caucus meetings, where the majority of crucial decisions are taken and seats that are supposed to be available are divided, are not open to women, especially those who are married. Several incidences of electoral violence were reported in Nigeria during the 2023 election period. Mrs Bina Jennifer Efidi, for example, who was a victim with a swollen face and blood streaming down her right cheek while being accredited to vote in the February 25 presidential and National Assembly elections on Dipolubi Street in Lagos' Surulere area, sent shivers down many Nigerians' spines (Okere, 2023). This incident highlights the alarming level of violence that marred the electoral process in Nigeria and scared many other women to participate in politics.

Financial Weakness: Finances play a significant role in postelection contestations where cases end up at the election tribunal. Many women, having sustained a full political campaign, cannot afford lengthy court cases. For example, the expensive cost of politics discourages women from running for office (Tolu-Kolawole et al., 2022). Women frequently lack the financial means to pay for the requisite expression of interest and nomination papers required by political parties in order to vie for seats on their agendas. Furthermore, election campaign costs are excessive. Women are disproportionately affected by this financial barrier since they have less access to financial resources than males. As a result, the high expense of politics creates an unfair playing field, restricting women's representation in political leadership positions. Furthermore, gender differences in decision-making processes are perpetuated, and existing power imbalances within political institutions are reinforced.

Cultural Discrimination: As a result of gender bias, cultural norms, and behaviours, women feel inferior to men in general and are at a disadvantage in the sociopolitical environment, even in urban areas. However, several of

the women who ran in the elections demonstrated extraordinary drive and endurance, defying all odds to put up a good fight. Ojei's political actions have centred on increasing women's political involvement and fighting for good government. She has also spoken out on the importance of addressing Nigeria's economic difficulties and improving the lives of regular Nigerians. She campaigned on a platform of economic diversification, job development, and social justice in the run-up to the 2023 presidential election. She also promised to combat insecurity and corruption, as well as promote Nigerian unity and peace. Despite being the only female presidential candidate in the campaign, Ojei failed to garner momentum with voters. Bola Tinubu of the All-Progressives Congress (APC) won the election with less than 25,000 votes (Ibizugbe, 2023). Ojei's political efforts have continued despite her electoral failure.

Ojei created the "Women Can Lead" project in 2022 with the goal of mentoring and supporting women interested in running for political office. She has also been an outspoken supporter of gender balance in political positions. She has urged Nigeria's government to implement a quota system to ensure that women make up at least 35% of all political appointees. Ojei's political activity has elicited a range of reactions. Some Nigerians have complimented her for her bravery and commitment in opposing Nigeria's male-dominated political status quo. Others have criticised her inexperience and unrealistic campaign pledges.

Women Ideology on Politics: Women are viewed as being too passive to participate in politics and administration, while men are seen as being more competitive, strong, independent, and willing to fight. The majority of women in rural areas lack the necessary political education to make important decisions on their own, leaving them open to political misfits or susceptible to their husbands' rules.

Conclusion and recommendations

Despite adversity, Nigerian women have made a significant economic and political contribution to the country's advancement. Numerous barriers impede women from participating in politics, which is regarded as an important forum for Nigerian women to meaningfully contribute to national advancement. Women's engagement in electoral activities in Nigeria's Fourth Republic is hampered by societal standards, cultural prejudices, economic inequities, and insufficient political structures. Despite global advancements in women's rights and political representation, Nigerian women face substantial obstacles to fully engaging in the democratic process.

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Pass and implement legislation that encourages gender equity and women's political participation. Quotas for women's representation in legislative bodies and punitive penalties for electoral violence against women are examples of such policies.
2. Women interested in politics should be given specific training and capacity-building programmes. To enhance confidence and competence, these programmes should focus on improving leadership abilities, campaign methods, and policy understanding.
3. Political parties should have internal policies that encourage the inclusion of women in leadership roles and candidate selection processes. They should also commit to party platforms that are gender-aware.
4. Advocate for work-life balance policies such as affordable childcare, maternity leave, and flexible working options. This will allow women to participate in politics without jeopardising their other duties.
5. The Nigerian state should increase its 30% affirmative action rate, even though it has not yet adhered precisely to this standard, in order to maximise women's contributions to national development.

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