


Chapter 14

Gender Mainstreaming and Nigeria's Women's Partisanship in 2023 General Elections: Exploring beyond Rhetoric

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Abstract

The phenomenon of gender mainstreaming remains a global affair, with different countries conscious of the inclusiveness of both men and women in public policymaking and implementation. Even though Nigeria's population enjoys almost equal proportions of males and females, the gender equality is more of a theoretical paradigm in which its actualisation looks like a mirage. Against this backdrop, this study explores gender mainstreaming and women's participation in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. No doubt, the voting strength of women was laudable during the election period. Elected representatives at the executive and legislative arms recorded male dominance and the popular 35% affirmative is far-fetched. With the adoption of Representation Theory, the study infers that the political pendulum swings largely towards the patriarchy system and as such questions the prospect of gender equality in the country. The study is a conceptual thesis that relies on secondary data collection and analysis. The findings indicate a reduction of women's representativeness as the outcome of the 2023 general elections lower the bar of elected females into various contested offices. In fact, on comparative ground, the 10th National Assembly would assemble fewer women within the range of 3.5% unlike the 9th National Assembly with the composition of 11.2% female legislators. The chapter recommends legislative enactment to improve women's representation in Nigeria's politics and governance. This should be followed up with advocacy and lobbying for effective realisation of gender equality in Nigeria. With this, the societal parochial sentiment towards female politicking can be easily relegated and potentials amongst women would not only be discovered but also contributed to socio-economic and political advancement in the country.

Keywords: Elections, Gender, Mainstreaming, Nigeria, Representation

Introduction

The syndrome of gender inequality is a global trend that has remained a concern to various advocacy groups. However, this phenomenon is more manifested in Africa and Nigeria's situation questions the country's voting patterns since the inception of democratisation in the polity. Despite the strength of women voters during the 2023 general elections, the outcome still maintains male dominance of political powers. In fact, recent statistics reveal that across the 36 legislative houses, men clear 95% of the seats. Beside Ekiti State with 23% of women's representation, states within the North West geo-political zone only recorded 0.46%, while the South-South could only account for 10% female legislators. Cumulatively, women's representation in the state legislative bodies is less than 6% nationwide (Daily Trust, May 25, 2023). The scenario at the executive level is yet to be women-friendly, as no female emerged victorious in either the presidential contests or gubernatorial electioneering.

This sad trend of women's under-representation is well captured in the recently released report of the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) that states low improvement in biases against women. According to the report (UNDP, 2023), half of the people worldwide still have the notion that men are better political officeholders than women. This is believed to be antithetical to a proportionate equality of population for both male and female (Udoji & Sakariyau, 2022). The Nigerian scenario has always recorded a high turn-out of women exercising their legitimate right via balloting, yet there are no positive remarks in terms of political representation as male patronage pushes politicking to be more favourable for the latter.

Put differently, Nigeria assented to the popular affirmative gender mainstreaming of 35% women's representativeness in governance at the Beijing convention (UN, 1995). This milestone is a mirage as a series of political transitions in the country since the beginning of the Fourth Republic fail to implement such a gesture. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (UN, 1979) was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in New York on 3 September 1981 witnessed Nigeria's signatory and assent, its application is yet to be realistic (Sakariyau & Zakuan, 2017). Though it can be argued that international conventions are not binding within the context of international power politics, enhancing better women's representation would not only boost Nigeria's democratic sphere but also downs agitation of lack of equal opportunities for the female counterpart.

Against this background information, this chapter explores gender mainstreaming and Nigeria's women's partisanship in the 2023 general elections. The study is divided into six sections. The first section contains background information on the subject matter. This is followed up by conceptualisations of relevant concepts while the third section looks at the theory supporting the study. The fourth section examines gender mainstreaming and the 2023 general elections. The fifth section examines the stumbling block to women's effective participation in Nigerian politics. The sixth section, which invariably gives concluding remarks, emphasises the role of the legislator as a catalyst to improving gender mainstreaming in Nigerian politics through effective lawmaking. It also gives relevant suggestions on strengthening women's partisanship in Nigeria's politics.

Conceptualising gender mainstreaming

The term 'gender' can be viewed from diverse perspectives, but it has been explained to define different kinds of roles and behaviours between two sexes (Adeosun & Owolabi, 2021; WHO, 2020). However, the inequality experienced in terms of roles and rewards within society justifies the stance of gender mainstreaming. This concept is centred on assessing the implications of gender inequality in any polity. The idea of gender mainstreaming, which was formalised during the Third World Conference on Women in 1985 (UN Women, 1985) and adopted by the United Nations has become a public policy for taming all kinds of gender inequality. For easier conceptualisation, the concept of gender inequality which invariably popularised gender mainstreaming, requires a comprehensive scholarly overview.

It has been observed that giving unequal access to men and women in relation to resources of society is a function of the perception that gender is a natural phenomenon (Nwajiuba, 2011). As submitted by Blackden et.al (2017), gender is an ideological tool that most likely dictates the direction and limits of accumulation, use and maintenance of assets by members of society. However, gender is generally used to refer to being male or female (Adeosun & Owolabi, 2021). In this sense, gender is fixed, as it denotes the biological classification of human beings into different sexes considering the differences in physiological compositions (Alamveabee, 2005).

Nevertheless, inequality explains the socially induced variations that divide an entire population into classes (Muntaner & Lynch, 1999), putting some beneath a defined poverty line (World Bank, 2011; UNDP, 2014). The idea of inequality emphasises economic as well as social segregation (Adeosun & Owolabi, 2021). In addition, inequality is a function of certain socio-economic

barriers or limitations which determine the position of individuals in the share of societal resources on class basis (Kleven & Landais, 2017).

Against this backdrop, gender inequality is a social conception that creates disparity between the male and female gender in society (Adeosun & Owolabi, 2021). Gender inequality is believed to have originated from the patriarchal system of social formations (Makama, 2013). By this system, men are accorded superiority over women in relation to control over developmental phenomena of education, politics and labour market, and so on (Salaam, 2003). The patriarchal conception of men further stresses discrimination against women in society as a symbol of the family lineage continuity as opposed to women who drop family names after marriage (Makama, 2013). This perception is eventually responsible for the experience of low self-esteem and low self-confidence by the female children in their future endeavours (Makama, 2013). It is this discriminatory system that ensures that men occupy virtually all critical positions in the public sphere (Okpe, 2005).

In line with the above narration, Anya (2003) associates relegating the womenfolk to domestic activities with the impression created by society that public engagements such as politics are the prerogative of men. Therefore, women are prevented from featuring in public engagements which could, as culturally assumed, take them away from their socially constructed primary assignments of childbearing and management of other family domestic matters (Obikeze, 2006). The relegation of women to domestic affairs remains a concern towards achieving balance in socio-economic and political dynamism.

In the feminist argument, the marginalisation of women is attributed to the emergence of the capitalist system of social organisation (Sylva, 2011). It is believed that women are oppressed in terms of their unfavourable economic positions which can only be changed through radicalisation of demand for their liberation (Pamela, 2005). Gender disparity is evident in the unequal treatment of women in the labour markets, where socially perceived less important jobs are given to them with unattractive rewards compared to their male counterparts (Brilleau, et.al., 2004, cited in Arbache et.al., 2010). In the work of Adebisi et.al. (2017), it is pinpointed that the need to liberate women from the shackles of gender inequality is stressed because discrimination against women further demotivates them to perform their socialisation role effectively. According to Afisi (2010), this contributed to the collapse of societal values that regulate behaviours in society.

In Nigeria, giving womenfolk the right to be recognised in social relations cannot be overemphasised. This view is supported by Ojalammi

(2011) who reveals that women in Nigeria are responsible for 70% of the workforce in the agricultural subsector of the economy, accounting for 90% of food production in the country. Although women in Nigeria contribute between 70% and 80% of economic activities in the informal and agricultural sectors, they are yet to receive the kind of accolades that they deserve (Oтите & Ogionwo, 2006). This is even though they scored highest in the global rank of the economic rate (Aina, 2012). In another dimension, religion is considered as a critical factor in the persistence of gender inequality in Nigerian society. This argument was pitched against the role that religion plays in almost all spheres of life of the Nigerian people (Sibani, 2017).

Put differently, women in a typical African tribe are socialised into believing that they are dependents throughout their life course (Ene-Obong et al., 2017). As such, they have no equal right with their male counterparts in the process of family inheritance (Agbasiere, 2015; Azuakor, 2017). Nevertheless, it has been reported that for Nigeria to achieve substantive economic growth, gender gaps must be closed (Archibon et al., 2018; Adegbite & Machethe, 2020). This narration concurs with the country's forecast on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015), as the issue of balancing must be addressed in order to follow international trends devoid of sentiment across gender.

In essence, the resurfacing of gender mainstreaming remains a unifying spot to ensure gender sensitivity, equal access and utilisation of services, equal involvement in decision-making and equitable treatment. With this, the uprising and agitation would drastically reduce and concerns often raised by the Human Development Index might reflect improvements in future reports. Within Nigeria's context, gender mainstreaming is not new, as the country ratified practically all international and regional conventions that protect human rights of every citizen. But the snag is, what is the level of implementation particularly on political affairs? This is the literature gap that this study fills, emphasising women's partisanship in the 2023 general elections. As clearly stated earlier, women's partisanship as voters was impressive, but as contestants, proved a sharp difference.

Theoretical underpinning: Exploring the Representation Theory

This study is anchored on the Theory of Representation. Historically, the Representation Theory evolved from the discipline of Mathematics, which focused on how groups act on given structures (Benjamin, 2012). This remains a mathematical theoretical paradigm in explaining sets and other components. However, the Representation Theory was introduced to

political studies after the evolution of indirect democracy. This emanated during the Middle Ages in many parts of Europe (Pitkin, 1969). Political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke have been described as representation theorists. The rationale and assumption of the theory revolves around the expansion of political space to accommodate various subdivisions within society. Since the paradigm shift from the direct democratic system of the old Greek city, representation became imperative towards an inclusive government.

Considering Hobbes' perspective on Representation Theory, he emphasises on freedom for the people to choose representatives devoid of marginalisation and bias. Though this stance is contested as some analysts believe representativeness does not necessarily require equality of gender, the theory places political liberalism at the fore. However, what makes the theory suitable for this study is its unrestricted political space to ensure freedom of partisanship in politicking and governance. It reflects creating an enabling atmosphere for any interested persons to partake in the policymaking process via joining political race.

But other views of representation seem to be utterly different from popular dimension. One can think of representation not as a way of acting for others but as standing for something absent. It means one person can stand for another and be substituted for that other, provided that they are sufficiently alike based on their resemblance. However, what separates representative legislature from some other collection of people is its accurate part-by-part correspondence to the larger population for which it stands. In this case, if political representation is to be well understood, it seems to depend on the descriptive likeness between representatives and those that they stand for. Representative legislature must reflect an accurate map of the entire polity and portray the various voices. This makes Hannah (1963) emphasise on proportional representation. Such is viewed by interpreting Mathematical Sampling Theory to the concept of representation. To Mill (1993), political representation is the best substitution for direct democracy but with convincing justification. From this stance, one can affirm that representation is expected to be a symbol of inclusiveness. By inclusiveness, it interests this study to explore gender mainstreaming to balance political representation.

No doubt, as part of the assumption of the Representation Theory, the government must project the value of accurate resemblance (Pitkin, 1969). Connecting this to women and politics, the proper resemblance can be well situated in having female counterparts in various political offices. The juxtaposition of Representation Theory in this study remains paramount as gender affirmative is linked to the accurate semblance of

balanced political representation. Unfortunately, despite the submission of the representativeness syndrome, the current political configuration in Nigeria does not resemble what the country claims to stand for amidst its commitment to gender mainstreaming (Sakariyau & Zakuan, 2017). This questions Nigeria's readiness to implement some of its ratification regarding women's rights and advocacy. For instance, the CEDAW convention that was adopted by the UN General Assembly in New York on 3 September 1981, which most of the participant countries, including Nigeria, agreed on 35% gender affirmative, its application is yet to be fulfilled in the country despite ratifying it in 1981.

Finally, the theory dwells on good and effective representative legislature, which is expected to be symbolic. By symbolic representation, political leaders must create charisma, enhance belief, and stimulate irrational and affective reactions in people. This makes symbolic representation different from descriptive representation. Interestingly, achieving a symbolic representation can be undermined with the formation of Nigeria's political atmosphere via jettisoning gender sensitivity. The National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies has a vital role towards advocacy for representative legislature that would be a symbolic and accurate resemblance of gender mainstreaming.

Gender mainstreaming and Nigeria's 2023 general elections: Was there fair play?

Since the inception of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, it is worthy to mention that the stable political transition in the country remains a plus to her democratic journey. The series of general elections conducted from 1999 until 2023 without military incursion in the politics of the country remains a strong atmosphere for the consolidation of Nigeria's democracy. Though the electoral process is not perfect like every other democracy, Nigeria keeps improving its electioneering circle by introducing various innovations that have boosted electoral democracy in the country. According to Sakariyau (2020), Nigeria's democracy combines elements of both liberalism and authoritarianism, which makes it hybrid. This showcases the failure of domestic democracy to suit the socio-cultural peculiarities of Nigeria's heterogeneous statehood. Nevertheless, the period of electioneering exercises in the country has enhanced political stability in the polity. This remains a plus for democratisation in the country. Largely, Nigeria's political transitions have improved tremendously, which invariably widens the democratic sphere in the country.

However, considering the theme of this section, the 2023 general elections had come and gone with certain dynamics. But unlike the expectation for improved women’s emergence in elective offices, the signal and percentage recorded by the females is far below the previous output. Before conducting an in-depth analysis regarding women’s electoral performance in the 2023 general elections, there is a need to give a prelude assessment of previous exercises.

The scenario of women’s under-representations predated the current picture. The Federal Republic of Nigeria’s Constitution (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999) guarantees women’s rights in partisan politics, Section 42(1) of the 1999 Constitution explicitly states that: “A citizen of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination”. Interestingly, in the last decade, Nigeria has witnessed a tremendous increase of women in political participation in party membership, voting, and vying for political offices (Akpam, 2015). Table 24 shows the number of women representatives in the parliament and the unavailability of women in the Presidency and Gubernatorial positions from 2003 to 2015. However, there is inherently some under-representation compared to their male counterparts. There was a decline in the percentage of women’s representation in elective positions. For instance, out of the 747 candidates cleared for Senatorial elections in 2015, only 122 women received clearance from the electoral commission. The swing of the pendulum did not favour women in the House of Representatives when 267 out of 1,774 candidates who were cleared were female contestants (Gabriel, 2015). The scenario of the 2011 general elections was also a disparity dimension in Nigeria’s politicking. Going by the database of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), a total of 7,160 candidates (men and women) contested the April 2011 elections. Of this number, only 628 women participated in the 2011 general elections (Makama, 2013).

Table 24: Women’s representation in 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 general elections.

Position	Available seats	2003	2007	2011	2015
Presidency	1	0	0	0	0
Senate	109	4 (3.7%)	9 (8.3%)	7 (6.4%)	7 (6.4%)
House of Reps	360	21 (5.8%)	26 (7.2%)	25 (6.9%)	19 (5.2%)
Governorship	36	0	0	0	0

Source: INEC (2015)

The 2019 elections did not record an impressive outlook for women, as the number of female representatives did not increase. In fact, there was a decline compared to previous outings (CDD, 2019). During the preparation for the 2019 elections, 91 political parties were registered, and the popular notion was that women stood a better chance of success. Unfortunately, the outcome of parties' primaries and subsequent general elections outcome exposed a setback for women's politics. From the fact sheet revealed by CDD, a meagre figure of 4.17% of elected women officials was recorded (Ebuka, 2019).

The preparation for the 2023 general elections commenced with strong hope to improve women's partisanship in politics with more focus on electing more females into elective offices. Several gender-based advocacies actually conducted a series of mobilisation and sensitisation campaigns ahead of the 2023 general elections. In fostering women's participation in Nigeria's elections, Diatom Impact Group and ElectHER were formidable non-governmental organisations that championed women's advocacy programmes and political reorientation of the female counterparts together with the males in enhancing the former electoral values in the country. In one of the programmes organised by the ElectHER, the group co-founder, Abosede Geogre-Organ, emphasised on a mission to strengthen gender equality and promote the participation of women in the 2023 general elections. The group was supported by Diatom Impact with grants to pursue women's stride in politics and also sponsored political campaigns of qualified women in various elective positions. As rightly pinpointed by George Organ of the ElectHER,

'Investment in girls and women, especially in politics will offer enormous benefits for the society and build a productive, and healthy community. Women participation in politics will cause greater investments in education, health, good policy making and other aspects. This prompts ElectHER to be focusing on women's political participation in order to bridge inequality gaps in Nigerian politics and under representation of women in elective offices' (Premier Times, November 20, 2022).

Consolidating the effort to place women's partisanship high in the 2023 general elections, the New-Life Community Care Initiative (NELCCI) made moves to ensure effective participation of women in the political process. There was a giant move from NELCCI in partnership with Women Aid Collective (WACOL) and Action Aid Nigeria on voters' education and women's leadership training. The groups organised the sensitisation programme in selected states across geo-political zones. Basically, as stated by Florence Ifeanyi-Aneke:

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As the 2023 general elections gathered momentum, the women should be at the forefront of making sure that the right candidates were voted into office. To achieve this, women should obtain their PVC and also be readily available to take part in the political process as a woman is eminently qualified to hold any elective position in Nigeria. So, this time around, the women should be ready to support one of their own as women access to right information was a prelude to financial freedom' (Daily Post, October 19, 2022)

The Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF) also emphasised the need to strengthen women's partisanship via several advocacies and programmes. The body categorically called for women voters to vote for their fellow women. During the organisation's sensitisation visit on women and their participation under NWTF #Balance4her campaign in the 2023 general election, the Chief Executive Officer, Mufuliat Fijabo said:

'Nigeria desperately needs women in government. The country and its political institutions cannot grow when half population is being left behind. The fresh approach to leadership is the one that brings women on board as best hope for improving citizens' quality of life and combating the deep-rooted corruption that has been linked to the nation's leadership. The present Nigeria's democracy has not been geometrically progressing as lack of inclusion of women in decision making affects the country's economy and security issues' (This Day, January 10, 2023)

Despite these, the outcome of the 2023 elections signalled a poor outing for female politicians as the February 25 presidential and National Assembly elections further demystified women's chances in the country's politicking. Out of the 92 women who contested for senatorial seats and the 286 who vied for House of Representatives slots, only 15 women (both Senate and House of Representatives) were appointed. Such an outing contradicts Nigeria's commitment by its ratification of treaties towards boosting women's involvement in politics (Okafor & Ileyemi, 2023). Besides the federal legislators, the performance of women across the State Houses of Assembly elections was not encouraging as statistics indicate less than 6% of female politicians clinched the legislative seats at the component levels nationwide. The North West and North East geo-political zones recorded less than 1% as female representations in their various legislative houses remain scanty (Daily Trust, May 25, 2023).

Put differently, the executive seats within the Nigerian elective contest have always been dominated by men, as no woman has yet to emerge victorious in the presidential and gubernatorial circles. However, there

was a scenario of acting female Governor in Anambra State, Dame Etiaba, from November 2006 to February 2007 when the Governor, Peter Obi was impeached by the State House of Assembly. The court later reinstated the Governor. The 2023 elections witnessed a strong and formidable force from a female gubernatorial candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC), Hajia Aishatu Binani, who challenged the incumbent Governor of Adamawa State, Ahmadu Fintiri of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Nevertheless, the final outcome still places women on subordinate political footing as none is yet to take the number one executive seat at both state and federal level.

In the final analysis, there is a misrepresentation across the polity as women struggle to attain viable political offices in the country. This implies that women's active role in politics is diminishing against the expectation of modern power politics which is supposed to embrace fairness and equity. The dominance of men across political lines proves Patriarchal Theory more applicable in the polity. The female population remains formidable, and the electoral process cannot undermine womenfolk in politics, but the snag still retains men continuously outplaying the political scenes across Nigeria. This questions equity and fairness as envisaged by the representation school of thought. Democracy signals liberty without any form of intimidation and marginalisation. However, the political dynamics in Nigeria are yet to be a balancer as the game of politics remains dominant of men's political parlance.

Stumbling variables to gender equality in contemporary Nigerian politics

Despite the global manifestation of gender inequality, this disturbing trend has peculiarities that vary depending on societal factors. Generally, Rashila and Saliha (1998) itemise five basic factors hindering women's activism in politics, ranging from social factors, time constraints, structural constraints, cultural or religious factors, and insufficient funds. These could be interpreted as holistic common excuses for women's marginalisation in politicking. However, there is no doubt that Nigeria shares the sentiments above; there are still unique contentious factors limiting females' political vibrancy in the country.

The sustained culture of the patriarchy system in Nigeria remains a stumbling block for gender equality. This cultural perspective hinders the economic and social activism of the female counterpart as certain professions are basically reserved for male dominance. According to the UNDP (2022), there is an alarming backlash against women's rights, which has crippled the economic well-being of several females. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic hit women more as the most jobs lost were within their

category. This contributes to the economic insecurity of women. Considering the Nigerian scenario, the economic culture designates certain jobs for men, neglecting the capacity of their female counterparts. For instance, basic jobs in the field of transportation, engineering and technical professions have always been perceived in the country as men's expertise, making women not want to signify interest in those sectors. The few women navigating such professions are tagged with derogatory adjectives. With this, it is culturally shocking to find women driving buses or piloting tricycles for commercial purposes. The few women exploring such have always been viewed as women with a masculine profession.

The parental preference for male children to be sufficiently educated also hinders equal opportunity that can guarantee gender equality in the country. The economic situation in the country could be attributed to one of the reasons for parents concentrating their available limited resources on male educational prowess ahead of their female counterparts. Though both sexes stand a better chance to be trained in tertiary institutions, postgraduate studies have always been male-dominated. This remains worrisome as the Human Development Index projects equal educational opportunity as a yardstick towards checking gender inequality (Sakariyau et al., 2020). The number of out-of-school children, particularly females, is alarming and reduces the chances of gender mainstreaming within the educational sector.

Politically, gender disparity is widely entrenched in Nigeria. Since the inception of the country's Fourth Republic, male dominance in the political atmosphere cannot be over-emphasised. By the nature of Nigeria's politicking, which requires rigorous and tougher campaigns, these have become masculine affairs. To Makama (2013), Nigerian politics is not largely guided by ideology, but rather it is a warfare engagement devoid of morality and decency. This singular approach is a sentiment working against women's involvement in any keenly contested electioneering. Be that as it may, partisan politics, particularly vying for elective offices, remains favourable to men. The federal political arrangement in the country has recorded male dominance across the 36 states. No woman has ever emerged victorious during gubernatorial elections, not to talk of winning the number one seat at the federal level, since the beginning of the current democratic dispensation in the country. Though women have been elected as members of the National Assembly, the percentage has always remained below the 35% gender affirmative ratified by Nigeria during the CEDAW that was adopted by the UN General Assembly in New York on 3 September 1981. Such simply indicates that Nigeria's theoretical ratification is not commensurate with practical operation.

In the final analysis, the gender equality advocacy requires robust dialogue via connecting the grassroots people with the urban inhabitants for proper orientation. Despite a series of gender-based civil society groups and government ministries of women affairs, society is yet to be well informed on the strategy and dynamics of gender equality that paves the way for equal opportunities and representations. The Nigerian polity fails to align with the United Nations Development Programme on gender equality strategy. The recent UNDP gender equality strategy (2022–2025) (UNDP, 2024) in the global context emphasises effective communication via orientation to reduce inequalities and exclusion of women in socio-economic and political spheres. With this, gender-based violence, the gender dimension of poverty and abuse of women's rights could be drastically reduced (UNDP, 2024).

Conclusion and recommendations

The concluding remark is tailored towards exploring how effective legislation can serve as a catalyst for improving women's representation in Nigerian politics. The significance of the legislative body in any democratic arrangement cannot be undermined. This is akin to the fact that legislators are critical actors in the socio-economic and political development of any democracy worldwide. Considering the Nigerian scenario, the National and State legislative bodies are vital instruments in public policymaking. The singular power of lawmaking is a responsibility that moves and shakes the dimension of the country's political atmosphere. The decisions of the legislators can make or mar the political future of the country.

However, the reduction of women's representation in the legislative bodies not only threatens gender mainstreaming in Nigeria but also lowers the voices of females in the public policymaking process. As noted earlier, after 23 years of democracy in Nigeria, women still struggle to attain 10% of representation in the political arena. The declining ratio of women's representation in politics is disappointing despite several programmes introduced by INEC to increase women's awareness of politics (INEC, 2019). It has also been observed that matters which are directly affecting women often suffer setbacks in parliament because of insufficient voices of the females. In place of this, this chapter tries to expose and pinpoint the strategic ways for ensuring successful passage of bills that revolve on gender sensitivity and invariably improves women's partisanship in political power.

Firstly, lobbying is a key instrument in any legislative arrangement. The right to lobby has changed some legislative decisions in the history of Nigeria's democracy. Several bills have been passed through lobbying. The notion of lobbying is vital to lawmakers globally. To achieve the affirmative

35% for women's representation in politics, more efforts should be placed on lobbying not only amongst the Principal Officers of the Legislature but also members of the National and State Houses of Assemblies. By lobbying, direct face-to-face contact or indirect methods can be adopted. But most importantly, the few women amongst the legislators can use their power of lobbying to persuade and influence sensitive bills for women's empowerment in the political setting. The notion of 'bench-warming' must be discarded by women at the plenary sessions. The women's voice should not be restricted to the secondment of motion or bills, sponsoring sensitive bills for women's viability in politics is required to toe the line of equal representation as envisaged by the United Nations at different fora.

In addition, the power of advocacy towards strengthening legislation for women's political viability is key. The passage of bills to enhance gender sensitivity requires robust advocacy. In view of this, different civil society groups can come up with formidable voices supporting women's political rights. This may require rigorous campaigns and mobilisation for female participation in politics. Though women's voting strength in Nigeria is high, their votes are usually cast for male aspirants. This indicates that women hardly vote for fellow female counterparts. The level of advocacy must be strategically channelled to ensure equal chances for women in politics.

Similarly, political socialisation is critical in enhancing women's partisanship in politics. The various tertiary institutions in Nigeria need to encourage female students across campuses to key into school politics. Generally, it has been observed that men's dominance in students' campus politics is an offshoot of national politicking. For instance, some of the political gladiators in national politics developed an interest in politicking during their days of active involvement in campus politics vis-à-vis students' unionism. Such narration can be improved with more female students taking leadership roles across various tertiary institutions in the country. This does not necessarily jettison male partisanship but it is a clarion call for young women to be initiated into competitive politics and leadership skills.

The mindset of viewing the female counterpart as the weaker sex must change. Serious advocacy is required to change peoples' mindset, which has denied discovery of potential talents amongst the females. Some non-governmental organisations have been advocating for a mindset shift to enhance high productivity amongst Nigerians, irrespective of gender. Legislative support can go a long way in changing the dimension of politicking in Nigeria from masculine dominance to equal representation. In fact, political parties can be mandated to consider a minimum of 30% of their slots to women during electioneering candidature selection. This can be achieved via passing a bill on electoral reform and political parties'

regulation. But such needs consistent and viable lobbying by carrying all relevant stakeholders along towards achieving the goal.

In the final analysis, gender mainstreaming is achievable if all relevant stakeholders support Nigeria's stride in attaining it beyond theoretical affirmation which has become frequent rhetoric within the polity. Convention and treaty ratifications have always been enjoying the country's signature, but implementation remains the major problem hindering the attainment of gender affirmative. Though there has been a series of advocacies and programmes on the significant role of women in politics, the swing of the pendulum is yet to be favourable. In view of this, as stated earlier, legislation is required to boost women's chances. The 10th National Assembly needs to come up with legislative policies to aid women's partisanship in politics. The appointment of principal officers in both the Senate and House of Representatives is not convincing towards an inclusive legislative body that would pave the way for women's strides.

The National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS), being the research and policy dialogue centre for the National Assembly, should continue its advocacy and sensitisation programmes targeted at improving women's inclusiveness. Such a gesture should not be left to female counterparts alone; the political stalwarts amongst the men need to brace the storm and come up with how the gender affirmative can be realised in the country. With this, the sentiment of belonging to a patriarchy state can be corrected and democratic representation devoid of gender bias would be attained and which invariably could place Nigeria's democracy on a higher scale.

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