

## Chapter 16

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# Intra-Party Democracy and Women's Political Participation in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

Over the years, there has been a global movement and debate aimed at promoting women's participation in every facet of society. The advocacy for increased women's political participation has generated more controversies than resolving the perceived gender imbalances in the global political processes. While the available records indicate that women's involvement in the political processes has increased in recent times, both at the national and international levels, there are still gender imbalances and insufficient involvement of women in political activities, especially in Nigeria since the return of democratic governance in 1999. The literature on women's political participation is dominated by the issues hindering women from active participation in politics. However, there is a shortage of studies on women's involvement in intra-party democracy and how this may have contributed to or constrained their wider political participation. To fill this

gap in the literature, this study examines women's involvement in intra-party democracy, and how this may have constraints on women's political participation. To do so, the study focuses on the two major political parties - The All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) - in Ekiti State. The study collected data from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with purposively selected executives and other prominent members of the state's two political parties. The secondary data was sourced from journal articles, publications and textbooks. The findings of the study indicated that the absence of intra-party democracy plays a significant role in the limited participation of women in party politics and the decision-making process, which has contributed collectively to the under-representation of women on the Nigerian political landscape. Amongst others, the study recommends that there should be a gender-sensitive review of the electoral system within political parties.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Intra-party, Political Participation, Political Party

## Introduction

At the very core of democracy is the opportunity for all citizens to take part in the administration of public affairs. However, fair representation of both men and women is a fundamental tenant of democracy. It creates a balance that more closely reflects the makeup of society. More importantly, studies have shown that gender-balanced decision-making leads to better outcomes and more effective policies. By including diverse perspectives and experiences, we can create more inclusive and equitable societies (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2005). According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2020), for democracy to hold significance and evolve, political policies and national laws must be collectively determined by both men and women, ensuring equal consideration for the interests and abilities of both genders. As a result, many initiatives and programmes have been introduced on both the national and international levels to recognise the significance of achieving gender parity in politics (M'Cormack-Hale, 2018). By encouraging equal opportunities for women and encouraging their active participation in decision-making processes, these initiatives seek to close the gender gap in political representation. Additionally, promoting gender mainstreaming in politics emphasises the significance of incorporating gender perspectives into formulating, implementing, and evaluating policies.

Efforts to achieve this gender equality in politics have received global attention, with the United Nations (UN) taking an early stand on women's rights and political participation. The UN has established conventions

and treaties, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (UN, 1979) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN, 1995), that highlight the importance of women's political empowerment. Regionally, African countries have also made commitments to increase women's participation in decision-making by signing protocols like the Maputo Protocol (AU, 2023) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Gender and Development Protocol (SADC, 2021). These agreements aim to promote gender equality and enhance women's political representation. As a result of these collective efforts, there has been an increase in the number of women occupying political leadership positions and participating in decision-making processes, contributing to more inclusive and equitable political landscapes. However, despite these efforts, the progress towards gender parity, especially in developing democracies like Nigeria, has been slow and uneven, with women still vastly under-represented and facing significant barriers to entry and advancement in political careers (Ake et al., 2019). Evidence abounds that women still make up a small portion of those involved in political decision-making and leadership in Nigeria, despite Nigeria's signing of the United Nations and other international organisations' advocacy and declaration of the rights and equality between men and women. The control of public life has been dominated by the male gender with little or no effort to incompatibly integrate the gender that occupies 49.6% of the world's population. This gender imbalance in political power has resulted in discrimination and marginalisation of women and hindered the full realisation of democracy's potential. According to Oloyede (2015), the national average for women in elective and appointed positions in Nigeria has remained at 6.7%, which is significantly lower than the averages for the world (22.5%), Africa (23.4%), and West Africa (15%). Despite the twenty-four years of democracy (1999–2023), Nigeria is yet to produce a female governor in any of the 36 states of the Federation, a female president or vice president, or the senate president. In the 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly, there are 29 women who make up about 6% of the total members, including the House of Representatives and the Senate, as opposed to 440 male legislators. In the 8<sup>th</sup> House, there were 438 male legislators as opposed to just 31 female legislators with a mere 5.3% representation in state legislatures (Dataphyte, 2020).

According to scholars (Ahikire, 2004; Beck, 2003; Tripp, 2000), the issue of gender disparity in some sub-Saharan African nations, including Nigeria, can be attributed to the prevailing political climate characterised by patrimonialism and clientelism. Studies have also revealed that factors affecting women's political participation vary depending on socioeconomic development, geography, culture, and political system (Shvedova, 2005; Alzuabi, 2016). In Nigeria, for instance, women are working to assert a

significant voice in shaping the direction of their states, but they have faced numerous obstacles that have only bolstered their resolve. According to Shvedova (2005), the political climate and conditions of the country are still hostile and unfriendly to women, while women who constitute close to half (presently 49.5%) of Nigeria's national population continue to suffer marginalisation and discrimination (Oni & Agbude, 2019).

Recently, there has been a significant global movement and ongoing discussions focused on enhancing women's participation in various positions addressing the perceived gender imbalances within political processes worldwide. While various efforts and discussions abound on the reasons for low women's representation in politics and governance, little or no attention has been paid to the activeness or inactivity of women in intra-party politics. The literature on women's political participation is dominated by the issues hindering women from active participation in politics and why so few of them are elected or appointed into political positions. While a lot of work has been performed on women's participation in politics, little attention has been paid to women's involvement in intra-party democracy and how this might have contributed to or has constrained their wider political participation. Political parties are central to the political process, serving as key gatekeepers for political positions and opportunities. However, understanding how women navigate and engage with intra-party dynamics sheds light on their challenges within party structures. There has been limited research that examines women's engagement in intra-party democracy and its impact on their broader political participation. The role of political parties in shaping women's involvement in politics remains understudied, leaving a gap in our understanding of how party dynamics may either facilitate or hinder women's participation in the political arena.

To fill this gap in the literature, this study explores the struggles for and the dynamics of power distribution in the political parties and how this may have constraints on women's political participation. To do so, the study will focus on the two major political parties – The All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) – in Ekiti State.

### **Intraparty democracy and women's political participation: A review**

Political parties are considered to be the bedrock of any democracy. However, there are some qualities that any party must meet for them to be seen as the backbone of democracy, as claimed. One such quality is internal party democracy and equal and fair representation (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011). Internal democracy, as Ojukwu and Olaifa (2011:28.) argue,

is a broad term that describes a wide range of methods for including party members in intra-party deliberations and decision-making processes. In essence, it is democracy within a political party and the extent to which the party subscribes to or abides by the basic democratic tenets (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011). Tyoden (1994) posits that for a political system to be adjudged democratic, the place of political parties in the political processes cannot be overemphasised. Political parties must be able to exhibit the ingredients of democracy in their internal workings and processes. In the same vein, party democracy influences participatory democracy, which can be described as a process that emphasises citizens' broad participation (in decision-making) in the direction and operation of political systems. In general, the argument is that parties adhering to the principles of internal democracy are likely to select more capable and appealing leaders, have more responsive policies, and, as a result, enjoy greater electoral success. In addition, using internal democratic procedures for political parties' deliberation and decisions strengthens democratic culture generally (Daskalovski, 2012).

Supporting this, Daskalovski (2012) states that political party democracy is hinged on some important elements. Firstly, in a multiparty competitive political system, parties are key to and are major actors of political power. All political activities, from the attainment of power to the exercise of power, in which parties are involved as actors, must be adequately democratic in their content, process and objective. The political process of making and running the government can be democratic only when the parties, as actors, are internally adequately democratic. Only those parties and leaders which practice democracy in the entire process of all their party affairs and business can give a democratic character to the content and process of the state. Secondly, political parties are the primary structure and forum for the formation of the political will of citizens and the mobilisation of their political actions. The process of formation of will and carrying out of action in democracy must be sufficiently democratic. To ensure a democratic method of will formation and mobilisation of action, the parties that initiate, coordinate, synthesise, and conduct them must follow and practice fundamental principles of democracy in conducting all their internal business. Thirdly, democracy depends not on charisma, wisdom, and commitment occasionally shown by a few leaders but primarily on qualities such as skill, knowledge and virtue that political parties and their members possess, demonstrate and use. Finally, democracy is not just about periodically electing leaders and public office bearers. It is a set of social norms that govern our conduct and behaviour. Therefore, fundamental principles, methods and ideals of democracy must be practised, without exception, in all social and public life which alone can contribute to the democratisation of society, state and public institutions (Daskalovski, 2012).

Furthermore, for political parties to adequately exhibit the fundamental principles of democracy, equal and fair representation of all members of the party is very important. Over the years, women have been considered marginalised in politics, especially intraparty politics. This has brought about the movement towards women's relevance in intra-party democracy and democracy at large and this has gained relevance all over the world (Elson, 2002; Rubin & Bartle, 2005). Women's political participation primarily refers to their involvement in politics, which includes voting, joining political parties, and participating in government. However, a variety of factors, such as sociocultural norms, institutional structures, and personal experiences, influence the meaning of this concept. Olayinka and Onwudiwe (2017) define 'women's political participation' as "the participation of women in political activities, particularly in decision-making processes that affect their lives and those of their families, communities, and nations." This definition highlights the importance of women's involvement in politics and the need for their voices to be heard in shaping policies that affect them and their communities. It also emphasises women's role in contributing to their nations' development. Similarly, Okolie-Osemene and Okolie-Osemene (2016) argue that women's political participation is "the inclusion of women in the political arena through voting, running for political office, engaging in political activism, and other forms of political engagement that shape political outcomes." In his study, Igbuzor (2018) conceptualised women's political participation as "the active participation of women in political processes, such as exercising their right to vote, having the option to run for office, and taking part in decision-making at various levels of government."

A number of academics have emphasised the significance of comprehending women's political participation within its broader socio-cultural context. For instance, Chandra Mohanty (2003) contends that to fully comprehend the significance of women's political participation, it is necessary to consider how gender interacts with other social identities, such as race, class, and nationality. Similarly, Phillips (2000) stresses the significance of understanding how cultural norms and gendered stereotypes influence women's political participation. Institutional factors also play a critical role in shaping the meaning of women's political participation. Several scholars have focused on the impact of legal frameworks and electoral systems on women's political participation.

The conceptualisation of women's political participation underscores the significance of women's political participation in promoting gender equality and ensuring that their needs and perspectives are represented in policymaking within and outside the party system. They also suggest that women's involvement in politics can lead to more inclusive and effective

governance and greater social and economic development. Overall, these definitions stress the value of women participating actively in politics and their capacity to impact decisions that impact their lives and communities.

## **Overview of women's political participation in Nigeria**

For a long time, scholars have been interested in women's political participation in Nigeria. Despite Nigeria's political and economic development, the under-representation of women in political leadership roles continues to be a serious problem. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, with a population of over 230 million. Despite Nigeria's robust economy, her women are under-represented in politics compared to men. Research on the causes of the under-representation of women in politics has been extensively conducted, and studies have revealed the low involvement of women in politics and the decision-making process. Despite the international advocacy for the inclusion of women in politics and decision-making processes, women in Nigeria continue to have little influence over political decision-making, according to studies. According to a 2017 study by Ogbonna and Ukamaka, women are frequently marginalised in politics and excluded from important decision-making roles, such as party leadership positions. Similar findings were made by Adepoju and Adepoju (2018), who discovered that women are under-represented in the House of Representatives, where they hold only 6.4% of the seats. A study by Olutayo (2018) found that cultural norms and practices, such as patriarchy and gendered expectations, create barriers to women's political participation.

Additionally, women often face discrimination and harassment in politics, which can deter them from seeking political office (Adeniyi et al., 2020). Adeniyi et al. (2020) suggest that affirmative action policies such as gender quotas, can be effective in increasing women's representation in politics. Similarly, Oluwole and Jegede (2018) argue that targeted interventions, such as political education and mentorship programmes, can help to build women's political skills and confidence.

Women's political participation is crucial for achieving gender equality and inclusive development, according to Nigerian academics. According to Akpan and Akpabio (2020), women's involvement in politics can encourage more responsive and inclusive policies catering to marginalised groups' needs. Adesina and Fawole (2018) claim that women's political participation can contribute to sustainable development by addressing gender-based discrimination and inequality.

## **Feminist Political Theory and party politics: A theoretical discourse**

This study delves into the intricate dynamics of intra-party politics and their relationship to women's political participation through the lens of Feminist Political Theory. As a political movement, feminism strives to combat various forms of inequality and dismantle the societal, cultural, economic, and political systems that subordinate women (Zalewski, 2000). By critically examining and reshaping institutions and theories that perpetuate women's subordination, feminist politics aims to eradicate the dominance imposed upon women. Situated within both Feminist Theory and Political Theory, Feminist Political Theory employs a feminist perspective to explore traditional inquiries within political philosophy, encompassing both contemporary and historical contexts (Tukur, 2014). It places women and their experiences at the forefront of political analysis. It challenges the existing power imbalance where men hold more power and privilege. By critically examining this gender-based disparity, it seeks transformative change and explores strategies for achieving a more equitable distribution of power and privilege between genders (Bryson, 2003:1).

In exploring the realm of intra-party politics in Nigeria, it becomes evident that the gender-power order described by Feminist Theory is a pervasive force that shapes and influences the distribution of power within political parties. This power structure determines the extent to which women are able to actively participate in political decision-making processes. However, this power order is often reflected in the under-representation of women in leadership positions and decision-making processes within political parties. Furthermore, it can perpetuate a culture that marginalises and silences women's voices, hindering their ability to effectively participate in and contribute to political discourse.

It is obvious that our society assigns distinct social benefits and burdens based on an individual's gender. As a result, the gender-based dichotomy becomes particularly relevant, as it influences the opportunities and challenges faced by women seeking political engagement within their respective parties. Gendered power dynamics, societal norms, and structural barriers shape women's opportunities and experiences within political parties. These factors often result in limited representation of women in leadership positions and decision-making roles within political parties. Political party operations are primarily created to support patriarchal patronage systems and serve the interests of men (Kelly, 2019). According to Pas et al. (2022), the rules and procedures that control the nomination stage within parties are created and structured in accordance with male norms and values. This gender bias in political party operations often results in the

under-representation of women in leadership positions and decision-making processes. Consequently, it perpetuates a cycle where women's voices and perspectives are marginalised, hindering progress towards gender equality in politics.

## **Methodology**

The study used a combination of primary and secondary sources to gather data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews conducted with purposefully selected executives and influential individuals from the two political parties in Ekiti State. Secondary data, on the other hand, was sourced from journal articles, publications, and textbooks. The field survey predominantly took place in Ado Ekiti, the state's capital city. The researcher employed the purposive and snowball sampling methods to determine the appropriate sample size for the study. These sampling techniques are commonly used in non-probability sampling when seeking information from well-informed individuals regarding specific socio-political phenomena.

Additionally, they are effective when the participants assist in recruiting other participants, particularly when potential participants are difficult to locate. In total, the study involved interviews with 15 participants. This group consisted of eight executives and prominent members from both the APC and PDP parties (four individuals from each party), two scholars specialising in the field of women in politics, and five party members (three from the APC and two from the PDP). The primary research instrument utilised was an interview guide, comprising ten questions. The gathered data underwent discourse analysis as part of the research process.

## **Findings and discussions**

This section focuses on the findings of this study. The study reveals that the two major political parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), lack intraparty democracy and female inclusion in intraparty politics. The study found that the APC and PDP exhibit a significant lack of internal democratic processes, such as transparent candidate selection and decision-making mechanisms. Furthermore, the study reveals a significant gender disparity within intraparty politics, implying a lack of female representation and participation. Women are consistently under-represented in key party positions such as leadership, nomination processes, and candidate selection. Female exclusion not only impedes gender equality, but also deprives political parties of diverse perspectives and undermines the potential for inclusive decision-making.

For example, a participant, a prominent member of the PDP in Ikole Local Government, Ward 10, who was also a female member of the Ekiti House of Assembly, stated:

*Look, intra-party democracy, to me, does not exist in Nigeria or even in my party in Ekiti State because the godfather will determine who gets what within the party system. They determine which assembly will represent virtually all the local governments in the state within the party. So, there is no democracy anywhere within the party, so long as we are not allowed to choose or make our choices. What we have in the party system today is selection, which the party regards as consensus, which I see as a fraud. There is no democracy within the party. (Field work, 2023).*

Supporting the findings, Hon. Mrs Lanre Fajuyi, an ex-officio member representing the PDP, South West Zone, emphasises that party leaders often determine the current process for selecting party members. This practice of leaders handpicking party executives undermines intra-party democracy and restricts the inclusivity of the selection process (Field work, 2023).

Corroborating this, a female card-carrying and prominent member of the APC, who wishes to remain unidentified noted:

*My party does not have internal party democracy; we have godfathers, which some people see as elders of the party, that dictate the turn by selecting the party excos, whom they believe will be loyal to them and the party. This lack of internal party democracy has led to a stifling of voices and ideas within the party. It creates a system where loyalty to the godfathers takes precedence over merit and the best interests of the party. (Field work, 2023).*

Giving further insight into the rating of females as executive members of the political party in Ekiti state, the PDP member of Ikole Local Government, Ward 10, Mrs Owolabi Akerele, who was also a female member of the Ekiti House of Assembly, explains that the rating of females as executive members is quite low compared to their male counterparts. She believes that this disparity is because of deep-rooted gender biases and stereotypes that still exist in the political landscape. She argued:

*Women's representation as executives and elected members is still very slim. It is even worse at the executive level, generally in my own party and other political parties. Out of 17 or 18 members in the ward, the only positions considered for female gender are the women leader or assistant secretary, ex-officio; these are the positions that are less important and will*

*affect the decision-making process in the party. This is usually from ward level to local government until it gets to the top (Field work, 2023).*

An APC member hailing from Ado-Ekiti Ward 2, who prefers to remain anonymous, pointed out that:

*Even though women and their male counterparts are given equal opportunity to compete for elective positions in the party by the constitution. To me they are impracticable in the real sense because of the patriarchal nature of men. Men tend to dominate and control decision-making processes within the party, making it difficult for women to truly have an equal chance. Additionally, societal expectations and stereotypes often discourage women from actively participating in politics, further limiting their representation within the party (Field work, 2023).*

An APC member from Ado-Ekiti ward 2, who did not want her name to be mentioned noted that:

*Even though the women and their male counterparts are given equal opportunity to compete for elective position in the party by the constitution, To me they are unpracticable in the real sense. Because of the patriarchy nature of men. They believe that governance and been in charge or ruling generally are their birth rights (Field work, 2023).*

She further argued:

*There is no existing structure that ensures women are given the position of executives within the party or outside the party, as was the case in Kenya and Botswana. For example, once you produce three senatorial seats, one of them must be occupied by women. Although there are so many policies for women's inclusion in Nigeria, to me, most of those policies are like toothless bulldogs that cannot bite but can only bark. For instance, INEC has a female-inclusive policy that is not enforceable but is just on paper. For instance, Ekiti has about 35 elective positions, and the names of the contestants that will be submitted to INEC will all be male without a single female name on the list, and INEC will collect them from political parties without querying them. This instance illustrates my conclusion that the policies are toothless bulldogs that cannot bite. The structure that is in place is patriarchal. i.e., seeing the man as the head of the family (Field work, 2023).*

In the same vein, a participant who is a female member of APC from the youth wing notes that women are not given equal opportunities as their male counterparts:

*the main reason for that is the stigmatisation that she is a woman, and some questions ensue, such as, does she have money? Can she do it? Can she be trusted? Who is her sponsor or godfather? And, Who is she sleeping with? because some leaders will say you are not loyal if you are not sleeping with them (Field work, 2023).*

This participant highlighted the pervasive gender bias and discrimination that women face within political parties. She emphasised that these stereotypes and assumptions about women's capabilities and personal relationships hinder their chances of being given equal opportunities for leadership positions. The participant also expressed concern about the role of party leaders in perpetuating this discriminatory culture by linking loyalty to sexual relationships.

Furthermore, a PDP stakeholder from Ado Ward 5 who preferred to remain anonymous explained the challenges of women in the decision-making process within the party politics. She explained thus:

*The challenge women faced in becoming excos at the party level is a lack of financial muscle to compete in the world of men. She explains further by saying that even if she was able to stabilise financially, she would still spend more than men to prove that she has the money, and as such, she would be able to gain ground. (Field work, 2023)*

Other points mentioned are political-based gender violence, insecurity, and intra-party manoeuvres. However, some other participants, especially those who are members of the PDP, argued that:

*Given insight into the complex dynamics of gender-based violence, it becomes evident that political motivations often play a significant role in perpetuating such acts. Additionally, the issue of insecurity further exacerbates the vulnerability of marginalised groups, making them more susceptible to violence and discrimination. Furthermore, the presence of intra-party manoeuvres within political organisations can hinder progress towards addressing these pressing issues as power struggles and internal conflicts divert attention and resources away from meaningful change. (Field work, 2023).*

In response to inquiries about potential solutions to the challenges faced by women in intra-party politics, a significant majority of participants suggest that the key lies in establishing a more inclusive and supportive environment within political parties. They emphasise the crucial role of party leaders in actively promoting and mentoring women candidates, ensuring equal opportunities for leadership positions, and addressing any gender biases or discrimination that may exist within party structures.

One of the participants argued:

*The way to ensure gender parity is to implement mandatory gender quotas within political parties. Setting specific targets or quotas for the representation of women in leadership positions can help address the existing gender imbalance. By requiring parties to allocate a certain percentage of positions to women, it would create a more level playing field and encourage the inclusion of qualified and capable women in decision-making roles (Field work, 2023).*

Also, Hon. Mrs Owolabi Akerele, who was also a female member of the Ekiti House of Assembly, explains steps to take to allow female inclusion in intraparty politics in Ekiti State and Nigeria as a whole. She noted a salient point:

*By ensuring political will prevails and that political parties and other stakeholders within and outside the parties should ensure the enforcement of policies that are in place, women will play an active role in party politics. Not only that, but political parties should be intentional in ensuring key positions within the party are occupied by female politicians (Field work, 2023).*

One significant finding of this study highlights the absence of intra-party democracy in the two major political parties, namely the APC and PDP, within the study area. This lack of internal democracy emerges as a key factor contributing to the under-representation of women in party politics and the decision-making process. The study reveals that the imposition of candidates by party elders within these parties has created an environment that hinders fair representation and inclusivity within the party. Consequently, this practice has perpetuated a system that undermines the active participation of women in party politics and their ability to influence decision-making processes. The finding is consistent with previous studies on internal party politics in Nigeria. For instance, the study of Akubo and Yakubu (2014) found that Nigeria's political parties lacked internal democracy because of problems of institutionalisation and personalisation. Furthermore, Egboh and Aniche's

(2012) study on the issue of international democracy within Nigerian political parties argued that the absence of internal party democracy in Nigerian political parties has a detrimental effect on the credibility of the overall electoral process, rendering it undemocratic.

Another notable finding of the study highlights the persistently low representation of women as executive elected members. Women are often limited to certain positions, such as women's leader, assistant secretary, and ex-officio, which are commonly regarded as positions of lesser significance. This limited scope of available positions for women further exacerbates their under-representation in party politics and decision-making processes. It underscores the urgent need to expand opportunities for women to hold influential and decision-making positions within political parties, breaking away from the prevailing perception that certain positions are inconsequential. Creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for women in party politics is essential to addressing these imbalances.

Consequentially, the study's findings highlight that despite the constitutional provisions for equal opportunities for women's and men's representation, reality reveals a stigmatisation of women within political parties. Women are often not trusted with positions of responsibility because of various factors, such as doubts about their trustworthiness, questions about their sponsors, or baseless speculations about their personal relationships. Also, the study's findings indicate a lack of existing structures that provide special consideration or support for women as executives within political parties. Unlike other contexts where certain positions are specifically designated for women, Nigerian political parties generally do not have such provisions. This absence of targeted measures to promote women's representation further exacerbates their under-representation within party structures.

Furthermore, the study's findings shed light on the existence of numerous policies aimed at promoting women's inclusion in Nigeria. However, these policies are often perceived as toothless bulldogs, lacking the necessary enforcement mechanisms to bring about substantial change. An illustrative example is the female-inclusive policy implemented by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which, although articulated on paper, lacks enforceability in practice because the policy is considered to be more of an advisory policy which does not mandate political parties to bring out certain percentage of their candidates as women.

For instance, within the context of Ekiti State, there are approximately 35 elective positions within the political parties. It is disheartening to note that when the contestants' names are submitted to INEC, there is often

no female candidate included in the list. Regrettably, INEC accepts these submissions from the political parties without addressing the glaring gender imbalance. This highlights the prevalence of a patriarchal structure, which reinforces the notion of the man as the primary decision-maker and head of the family. The findings are consistent with those of Adeleke (2014), who worked on women's political participation at the local government level. Her findings reveal that patriarchy is the major challenge that women face in politics.

In conclusion, the field research revealed that patriarchy, limited financial resources for competition, political gender-based violence, insecurity, and internal manoeuvring are the primary obstacles encountered by women in Nigerian party politics.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

In conclusion, the results of this study strongly suggest that problems at the party level are primarily responsible for Nigeria's low representation of women and the marginalisation of women in the decision-making process. According to the study, party politics in Nigeria are marked by a lack of internal party democracy, the imposition of candidates by party elders, and patriarchal structures that uphold gender inequality. These party-level challenges create significant barriers for women seeking to actively participate and assume leadership roles in the country. The lack of transparent and inclusive processes for candidate selection and the dominance of party elders in decision-making undermine women's opportunities for equal representation and participation.

This under-representation of women within party structures is a significant barrier to their advancement in Nigerian politics. Without specific provisions to address this issue, women face additional challenges in accessing leadership positions and having their voices heard within political parties. Consequently, Nigerian political parties must adopt inclusive measures that prioritise gender equality and empower women to actively participate in decision-making processes. It is crucial for political parties to take the lead in creating a more inclusive and gender-balanced political landscape that reflects the diverse perspectives and talents of women, ultimately contributing to more equitable and effective decision-making at all levels of governance in Nigeria.

The study emphasises the critical need for political party reforms to address these issues. Promoting intra-party democracy is essential, and this can be accomplished by establishing transparent, equitable, and equal opportunity processes for choosing candidates. Party structures

should be updated to promote the inclusion and advancement of women in leadership positions, and party leaders should actively support and mentor female candidates. Furthermore, there is a critical need to develop and enforce gender-sensitive policies within political parties. Gender quotas or affirmative action measures can help bridge the gender gap by mandating a certain percentage of women's representation in party leadership positions.

Based on the findings of the study regarding the marginalisation of women in the decision-making process and the low representation of women in Nigeria, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Promote intra-party democracy by giving priority to and putting in place open, inclusive candidate selection procedures. This involves holding free and transparent primaries where party members can choose the candidates. Women will have equal opportunities to participate and compete for positions if internal party democracy is supported.
- Implement gender quotas: Political parties should create and enforce gender quotas or affirmative action guidelines that call for a specific proportion of women to hold leadership positions within their organisations. These steps can ensure that women are meaningfully represented and that their under-representation in decision-making processes is addressed.
- Address patriarchal biases and structures: Patriarchal structures within political parties should be contested and dismantled. This can be accomplished by running awareness campaigns, attending training sessions, and participating in workshops that promote gender equality, confront gender biases, and create welcoming social environments.
- Increase financial support: Women need access to financial resources in order to successfully participate in party politics. Political parties should set up funding mechanisms, such as grants or funds created specially to help women candidates cover campaign costs and associated expenses.
- Political parties should adopt zero-tolerance policies for political gender-based violence in order to combat it. They should actively work to create an atmosphere where women can engage in politics and feel safe and respected, and they should offer procedures for reporting and dealing with any acts of violence or harassment.
- Promote women's leadership development: Political parties should fund initiatives that are specifically geared towards empowering women in leadership roles. These programmes can give women the abilities, information, and self-assurance they need to hold positions of leadership both within their own party and in the larger political community. Implementing these recommendations will contribute to greater gender

equality, increased representation of women, and a more inclusive and democratic political landscape in Nigeria.

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