WOMEN MARGINALIZATION IN ELECTORAL POLITICS IN NIGERIA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract
Global patriarchy has given ascendancy to men in politics, authority and decision-making in and outside the family. Under such a male-centred system without a female face, women lack access to politics and decision-making and are highly under-represented at most levels of government. This paper analyses marginalization of women in decision-making and the challenges encountered by female politicians on their way to political participation in Nigeria. It also, contends that the power relations that have prevented women from political activism operate in many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public. It argues that the gender uneven electoral politics in Nigeria is as a result of men’ majority in the political party hierarchy, which places them at a vantage position to influence party’s internal politics in terms of selecting or electing candidates for electrons, and political patronage. The paper notes that socio-cultural, economic, political, organizational, legal and political factors have combined to shape the “home-centred’ perception of Nigerian women, and explains the level of participation of women in political and bureaucratic decision-making positions. To reverse the historical under-represented Nigerian women in politics, and decision-making in governance, the paper proposes a triad strategy for women empowerment. First, is a women friendly legal framework in which affirmative action principles are incorporated into the Nigerian Constitution and Electoral Act. Second, is exhibition of positive role modeling for gender image laundering by the few women in top political and administrative positions. Third, is the advancement of women’ agenda and support of party activities as well as funding of women who are actively seeking political offices as a mechanism for addressing the imbalances and injustices against Nigerian women.

Key Words: Gender, Politics, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Marginalisation, Equal Opportunity Act, Decision-making, National Gender Policy.
Introduction

It is axiomatic to posit that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his or her country. Also, the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women’s socio-economic and political status is significant for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life. The power relations that prevent women from leading fulfilled life operate in many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public.

Despite the widespread movement towards democratization in most polities, women are highly under represented\(^1\) at most levels of government, especially in ministerial and other executive bodies, and have made little progress in attaining political power in legislative bodies or in achieving the target endorsed by the Economic and Social Council of having 30 percent women in positions at decision making levels by 1995 (UNO, 1996:109). While the Beijing Platform for Action seeks 30 percent share of decision making positions for women only 16 countries attained this objectives in the 1990s (Amanor – Wilks, 2002:10). In Africa, according to data compiled by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, four countries that came closest to achieving 30 percent female decision makers in 1997 were Seychelles (27 percent), South African (25 percent) Mozambique (25 percent) and 

\(^1\) While 47 million Nigerians registered as eligible voters in the 1999 elections, of this figure, 27 million were women representing 57.4\% of registered voters. In the first Republic, no woman was able to win election into the federal legislature, though three women were elected into the Eastern House of Assembly in the 1961 regional elections. In the Second Republic, only female Senator, Franca Afegbua, was elected into the Senate in 1983, she however, served for only three months before that Republic collapsed. In 1992, out of the 300 gubernatorial aspirants during the transition programme of Ibrahim Babangida, only 8 were women, representing a paltry 2.6\%. None of them was able to make it to any of the Government Houses, as all the states were won by men. Also, of the party executive positions of the parties that existed then, women had only 4\%. In 1999, there were a total of 11,117 electable positions available, out of this number, only 631 women contested which is a mere 5.6\%. Of the 631 female contestants, only 180 managed to win. Out of the 180 that won, 143 were elected at the ward levels as councilors. The 180 elective positions occupied by women during this period represented only 1.6\% of the total number of elective positions available during this era. In Obasanjo’s first term (1999-2003), only 1.6\% of elective positions were occupied by women. In 2003, no woman occupied the government House of any of the 36 states as the Chief Executive. For the State House of Assembly, only 3.54\% of the seats were occupied by women. For the House of Representatives, only 6.11\% of the seats were occupied by women and in the Senate, they had only 3.67\% of the seats. Following the Supreme Court judgement on 14th June, 2007 that Mr. Peter Obi (elected on the platform of APGA) has not finished serving his tenure, Andy Uba (whose deputy was Stella Odife) left office as Governor of Anambra State. As, Virgie Etioba, became Peter Obi’s deputy. Though the percentage of women elected into the State House of Assembly rose from 3.54\% in 2003 to 5.4\% in 2007; 6.11\% to 7.2\% (for House of Representatives; and 3.67\% to 8.3\% (for Senate), it is still very far behind that of men judged against the 30\% international benchmark.( For a more detailed discussion on gender and politics in Nigeria See. Ako-Nai, R. I. (2005), “Gendered Institutions: Women and Politics in Nigeria” in Godwin Onuh and Abubakar Momoh (eds.), Election and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria. Lagos: NPSA; Okoosi-Simbine, A. T. (2006), “Women, Marginalization and Politics in Nigeria: A Review Essay” in Albert Isaac Olawale et al (eds.), Toward the 2007 Elections: Perspectives on the 2003 Election in Nigeria. Abuja:IDASA; Oleru, Johnson (1999), “Mobilizing and Organizing

Eritrea (21 percent), but 36 countries had less than 10 percent female representation in government. Recently, South Africa has increased women representation 27 percent, Uganda and Rwanda have 25 percent and 48.8 respectively (Egwu, 2005:13).

In home turf in Nigeria, women have never had it so good. Since independence from Great Britain in 1960, no woman has been elected governor in any Nigerian 36 states and the country has never had female president. Nigeria had to wait nineteen years after independence to appoint her first female Minister in the person of Chief Adenike Ebun Oyagbola who was appointed Nigeria’s Minister of National Planning in 1979-1983/4.

On the 13th of June 1985, the Federal Government signed and ratified the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. However, between then and now, there is still large scale discrimination from the men folk, both in noting for candidates and in assigning political offices.

Nevertheless, the place of women in Nigeria’s socio political firmament has always been a strong one. In history, myths and legends across the country, noble roles have been ascribed to women in the past and they have served as agents of change, bringing positive verve to the tone of life in the society. A few instances would suffice: in Ife, Moremi Ajasoro that is a name that is revered till today because of the role she played in the liberation of her people.

In the North, the legendary Queen Amina of Zazzau was a powerful force in the administration of the kingdom in the 15th and 16th centuries. Queen Idia of Bini Kingdom belongs to the same league like Moremi and Amina. In Modern Nigeria, among the names that denote the power of homes are the late Margaret Ekpo, late Gambo Sawaba, late Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, who fought tirelessly against the suppression and taxation of women in the North, and Abeokuta.

The list is endless. However, of recent this impressive role played by women has come under severe strain leading to a complete relegation if not total absence in the political sphere of Nigeria. In the words of Sui Lang Panoke:

> Women’s political representation in Nigeria is among the lowest in the World. As recent as 2010, Nigeria ranked 117th in the World in terms of women representation in a national legislature or parliament. Africa is home of countries with the highest representation of women in national government with Rwanda coming first and South Africa ranking third (Williams, 2010:70).

This article seeks to explore the epochal historical marginalization of women in decision making in Nigeria and the challenges female politicians encounter on their way to political participation. The paper provides opportunity for challenges to be discussed and solutions proffered.

**Theorizing Women Marginalisation**

The issues of culture and religion are very serious in some societies. Some cultures still do not believe that women can be leaders while men are followers. Because of this, women who venture into politics are seen as cultural deviants. In other words, patriarchy is not only entrenched in the society, but is also elevated to the state of policy. Women are expected to subordinate themselves to men. This is what cost Mrs. Margaret Icheen her seat as the speaker of Benue State House of Assembly. The seat was made so hot for her that she eventually resigned. According to Boserup (1970), Kaufman Dorsey et al (1989), Imam
Will’s (1991), UN (1987) Nzomo (1994), among others have posited that the most significant barrier is the socio-cultural system of belief are myths, which informed the socialization process and the gendered education and training most men and women are exposed to from childhood.

According to Nzomo (1994), the sex-stereotypes and gender segregation in employment and allocation of roles in private and public life are fundamentally a product of the early socialization process, the indoctrination of the social environment. In this regard many women’s hang-ups and lack of confidence in their ability competently to execute public leadership roles arises from socialization for subordination. However, it is in the socio-cultural context that women’s secondary role is most evident and has the most important consequences for the participation of women in politics.

In the words of Osinulu,

The consideration of the Federal Republic of Nigeria clearly stipulates that no individual (man or woman) should be discriminated against in the exercise of his or her rights to certain basic necessities of life, citizenship, shelter, education, right to freedom of speech, etc. In practice however, discriminatory practices against the female gender abound in all facets of life. Women are discriminated against at the early stages of life. For instance, the arrival of a baby boy in the family is heralded with great pomp and bride by its parents, but not so with the baby girl. The girl child; in May part of the country is withdrawn from school to help on the farm or share in the household chores, while the boy child is allowed to continue his education uninterrupted. Even where girls do continue their education, the rate of attraction is much higher for girls than boys (1996:20).

These are other discriminatory practices in our socio-cultural environment have had the effect that the average Nigerian woman is timid, uneducated, lack leadership skills and is no match for her male counterpart. She has not been prepared for any leadership position of any sort. Women are expected to support men, not to be seen to be confronting them or demanding equality and thereby fostering hostility and antagonism:

There is no need for a woman to be liberated from man … the Men own the government. There is a need for women to fully participate in government but we need some level of understanding. We (the NCWS) are not there to take away what they have but we Are there to assist them in doing what ever they do better (Pereira, 2003: 146)

In other words, this thesis posits that women’s roles are secondary and are just an additional activity to their domestic roles. Imam et al (1985) and Parpart (1990) among others have documented the woes of the ‘double day’ that working career women have to bear, especially in Africa where support services are few, absent or even when they exist. Nzomo (1994) quoting Paepart (1990) notes that,

Given the existing gender division of labour, there are not easy solutions for a woman who wants to succeed in her career: most working women juggle harried schedules… having fewer children or becoming single, separated or divorced in order to reduce time spent on husband’s care, delay and give up marriage or family and relationships (Nzomo, 1994:205).

A 1987 UN survey further notes that even in the rare occasions when a woman has fought her way into the top decision-making position, further barriers are often erected that contribute to disemboweling her and crowding her effectiveness in that position (UN, 1987:35).

Explaining the socio-cultural sex role thesis further, the 1987 UN study goes on to argue that because people rely on stereotypes to evaluate observed behaviour, there may be perceived conflict between the behaviour that the high position requires and the behaviour general expected of women. And because most leadership positions are filled by men who
are used to relating to women as mother, sister daughter or secretary-assistant, many professional male managers may never have had male as a woman ‘boss’ as top executive. Moreover, due to the deep rooted traditional beliefs about the subordinate role of women in society, both men and women may find it difficult to accord the top female public decision maker the respect and cooperation she requires to be effective (Nzomo, 1994:205).

The second barrier to women’s participation in public role and politics is the lack of access to adequate quality formal education thesis. This thesis posits that lack of adequate quality of formal education in itself acts as a major barrier to a woman’s advancement to top decision-making level. And because of lack of education, because of the customs in which they were brought up, the men who were in the position to write all the documents are the domineering factors that keep singing that a woman’s place is at home.

The lack of education and expertise among the womenfolk in relation to the demands of political leadership is an impediment incidental to women’s participation in politics. As a result of low educational and professional attainment, they are poorly equipped mentally to venture into the male dominated world of politics. As a result of her deficiency in the fields of education, professional ability and poor leadership skills, the Nigerian woman lacks self-confidence, courage and boldness required to aim for the highest post in political arena. The reasons that account for such that account for such a poor status are not farfetched; the literacy rate is lower for women (54%) than for men (31%) in many parts of the country, girls are withdrawn from schools for various reasons (child marriage, child labour, trading, etc), while for those who do enroll in schools, the rate of attrition is higher for girls than for boys (Osinulu, 1996:21-22).

In political terms therefore, individual resources which include education, personal income, age, marital status, number of children, and view of the spouse among others are significant determinants for the women’s participation in politics.

Another factor, which is viewed important, is the political system, as it promotes or hinders women’s political activity. For example, the party structure can impede participation of women. Information about politics can be disseminated through channels that men have more access to than women and the language of politics can be a decidedly male jargon, which appears foreign to women. Political ideology can reinforce traditional division of work by gender, with politics being linked to the activities of men rather than women (Haavio \manila, et al, 1985:48). As Agina-ude argues:

It is not known that any political party has any strategy for equal representation in its executive as required by the platform for action. So far, besides creating the post of the women leader, parties have not adopted any other system to increase the number of women holding party offices. Experience during the last general elections shows that some parties had unwritten policies against female aspirants. The cases of Chief (Mrs.) A.M Osomo and some others who won the party primaries but were supplanted with men that lost are illustrative. Even though the parties tried to hide the actual reasons for the injustice, they latter admitted that the fear that the women would lose in the final elections was the real motive. Such fears might not have been unfounded as Nigerian electors are still largely biased against women (Agina-ude, 2003: 4-5).

In the words of Sarah Jibril “… how many women qualified to run for the senate? Out of four or five, but only one won, if the party had promoted women’s course, more women would have won because they are not mediocre. It appears, in the two parties, men worked against women” (Ogunsola, 1996:77).

In addition to the barrier discussed above, is the lack of adequate finance or amount of money. Politics an expensive business that requires huge sums of money, especially in Nigeria where the amount of money one has in his/her pockets goes a long way in determining one’s electoral fortunes. This thesis is that many women are poor, and even the
wealthy ones may not be independently so. Hence, they may not be able to afford the enormous amount of money required to fund an electoral campaign (Wills, 1991:22). According to Nzomo (1994), the overall argument then being made in much of the literature of this subject is that socio-cultural, economic, political, organizational, legal and political factors are related to the level of participation of women in political and bureaucratic decision-making positions. Duverger summarizes the constants to women’s political participation appropriately as follows:

If the majority of women are little attracted to political careers, it is because everything tends to turn them away from the, if they allow politics to remain essentially a man’s business, it is because everything is conducive to this belief tradition, family life, education, religion and literature. The small part played by women in politics merely reflects and results from the secondary place to which they are assigned by the custom and attitudes of our society and which their education and training tend to make them accept as the natural order of things (Duverger, 1975:129-130; Nzomo, 1994:206).

Given the existing man-made barriers to women’s participation, most of the literature on that subject suggests, as a matter of strategy, the development of a strong women’s movement in each country, in an attempt to overcome obstacles to participation. Women need to support and work for each other to overcome by discriminations. Even where gender equality policies are in place, women need to monitor their implementation as complete reliance on the good well of policy makers and employers many of whom are men, many bring some reforms but not fundamentally change (Wills, 1991:24, Nzomo, 1994:206).

This failure to incorporate women’ concerns in decision making represent a major loss for the society as a whole. Women’s needs, interests and concerns are not just those of women themselves; but reflect their fundamental roles as mothers, wives and caregivers therefore, incorporating the needs and interests of a women, children, and families (including the male members).

CFCR (2005:7) summarizes the two theses in the following words:

1. It is unjust, illegitimate and undemocratic to exclude women from the political process,
2. The views of 50 percent of the population cannot be ignored;
3. Democracy must be inclusive of the diverse perspectives of the values of women as well as men in arriving to decisions and carrying forward any strategy; and
4. Women’s political rights are an integral and inseparable part of their human right.

It is against this background that Nigerian women have agitated for greater access and representation of women in politics and decision-making.

**Theoretical Perspective**

This paper will adopt the *Justice – as – fairness theory* as its framework of analysis. This theory is closely associated to John Rawls. John Rawls posits that the public interest can be discerned in most situations by applying two principles of justice:

1. That each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty by others, and
2. That “social and economic in equalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be every one’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all” (Rawls 1971:60).

Ezeani (2005:392) adds that in a situation where these principles conflicts, Rawls, state that the second should yield to the first. Thus, the dignity of the human person is regarded to be of paramount importance. Rawls principles lead to the conclusion that inequality of wealth, authority and social opportunity:

are just only if they result in compensating benefits for everyone and in particular for the least advantage members of society. These principles rule out justifying institutions on the grounds that the hardships of some are offset by a greater good in the aggregate. It may be expedient but it is not just some should have less in order that others may prosper (Rawls, 1971:70).

Creating this reality for women hinges on getting a women friendly legal framework in place. For instance, about forty seven (47) African countries have ratified the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, signifying political commitment to women’s empowerment. In some polities there has been encouraging progress to wards establishing laws to remove gender discrimination. The extent to which the justice theory provides a guide to political science and public administration in formulating decisions in terms of promoting public interest by assisting members of socially disadvantaged groups that have suffered discrimination (Henry, 2002).

Affirmative action such as the use of quota system has been in cooperated in the constitutions of Uganda, Malawi and South Africa. Effective quota systems help to effectively recruit women into the state executive councils, parliament, and political parties. Quotas have also been established as a crucial first step towards the creation of a critical mass of women who can influence policy and decision making effectively. According to Henry (2002:404):

The reasoning is that, because of cultural bias in testing, lack of educational opportunity, and general social prejudice, government owes those people who have suffered these injustices a special chance to get ahead. If this should entail some bending of the civil service regulations then so are it.

Such diversity or affirmative action policies such as “Equal Opportunity Act” in the United States, “Federal Character and Quota System” in Nigeria are in formed by this line of thought. Justice theory, therefore, offers politician and public administrators’ workable guide for determining the public interest.

Applying this theory to our study, many Non-governmental organizations, political parties and even the recent National Gender Policy in Nigeria have added currency to the debate. For instance, political parties do not charge expression of interest money or for forms on women who running under their platform. Parties such as the Action Congress of Nigeria are women friendly. Moreover, since 1999 women have been given challenging positions both in public and private sectors.

Marginalization of Women in Electoral Politics: A Thematic Exposition.

In spite of the guaranties of equality in conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and other treaties, to which Nigeria is a signatory, there are glaring inequalities at all levels of decision making. The limited participation of women in the political sphere which was glaring since post independence Nigeria is due to a number of factors such as the socio-cultural determinants, which established women’s domain in the private sphere. In the words of Oby Nwankwo:

Women were discouraged from seeking political offices by discriminatory attitudes and practices, family and child care responsibilities, and the high
cost of seeking and holding public office, socialization and negative stereo
tying of through the media, reinforcing the tendency for political decision
making to remain the domain of men (Nwankwo, 2009:60).

Oluchi Ikemefuna adds:

Women in Nigeria face a lot of odds when they contest with men. The parties often
want those who can match violence with violence, those who can coerce people to note for
them. Men are widely held to be more prepared to engage in violence than women
(Leadership Sunday Editorial, 2010:14).

Thus, the gender specific unevenness of electoral politics manifested itself in the
following forms:

1. The persisting social resistance and / or lukewarm acceptance of women’s
participation in political leadership. This is in spite of the spectacular
performance of the few women who held sway as heads of ministries and
parastatals in this dispensation.
2. Culture of electoral violence that tends to be harsher towards female than male
candidates;
3. Feminization of poverty that renders women more financially constrained to
manage a campaign than men.
4. Lack of adequate political socialization for leadership that manifests itself in
women’s exclusion from access to strategic political information and general
inability in the art of public oratory and populist campaign and
5. Women’s marginalization in mainstream political party hierarchy and hence.
Inability to shape rules of engagement (especially at the nomination stage),
which are defined and organized around male norms and values (Nzomo,

Women in Electoral Politics in Nigeria: 1960-2011

The role of women in Nigeria’s post independent politics has not been reflected
sufficiently, in terms of appointments in policy-making posts. In spite of massive support
given to various political parties by women, women organizations, market women
movements among others, until recently, very few women benefited from political patronage.
This is because more often than not, men constitute larger percentage of the party
membership and this tends to affect women when it comes to selecting or electing candidates
for elections since men are usually the majority in the political party hierarchy, they tend to
dominate the political hierarchy and are therefore at advantage in influencing the party’s
internal politics (see leadership, 2010:24).

In Southern Nigeria, women where already had franchise by 1960 thus in 960, Mrs
Wuraola Esan from Western Nigeria become the first female member of the Federal
Parliament. In 1961, Chief (Mrs) Margent Ekpo contested election in Aba Urban North
constituency under the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) platform and won,
becoming a member of the Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly until 1960; Mrs. Janet, N.
Mokelu and Miss. Ekpo A. Young also contested elections, won and became members of the
Eastern House of Assembly.

In Northern Nigeria, however, women were still denied the franchise even after
independence. As a result, prominent female politicians like Hajia Gambo Swaba in the
North could not vote and be voted for. It was only in 1979 that women in Northern Nigeria
were given franchise, following the return to civilian politics.

During the Second Republic (1979-1983), there was further progress. A few Nigerian
women won elations into the House of Representative at the National level, some of those
women are: (Mrs) J.C. Eze of the Nigerian people’s Party (NPP) who represented Uzo Uwani
constituency in former Anambra State, Mrs V.O Nnaji, also of NPP who represented Isu and
Mrs Abiola Babatope of Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) who represented Mushin Central II of
Lagos State. But on the whole, very few women won elections into the State Houses of Assembly during the Second Republic.

During the same period only two women were appointed federal ministers. They were Chief (Mrs) Janet Akinrinade who was Minister for internal affairs and Mrs Adenike Ebun Oyagbola, Minister for National planning. Mrs Francisca Yetunde Emmanuel was the only female permanent secretary (first in the Federal Ministry of Establishment and Later Federal Ministry of Health).

A number of women were appointed commissioner in the states. In 1983. Mrs. Franca Afegbua became the only woman to be elected into the Senate. Also, very few women contested and won elections into the Local Government Councils during this time. With the return of military rule of December 1983, the first formal quota system was introduced by the Federal Government as regard the appointment of women into governance. The Buhari administration directed that the at least, one female must be appointed a member of the Executive Council in every State. All the states complied with this directive; some states even had two to three female members. In the early 1990’s two were appointed Deputy Governor. These were Alhaja Latifa, Okunu of Lagos State and Mrs Pamela Sadauki of Kaduna State; Chief (Mrs) D.B.A Kuifirijiolubi served as chairperson of a bank, the United Bank for Africa PLC. Later on, Dr Simi Johnson and Eniola Fadayomi served as chairpersons of Afribank International Nigerian and Allied Bank Nigeria PLC, respectively. There was also no female member of the defunct Supreme Military Council or the later Armed forces Ruling Council.

In the 1990 elections into local governments heralding the Third Republic, very few women emerged as councilors and only one women Chef (Mrs) Titilayo Ajanaku, emerged as chairperson of a local Government Council in the South West. During the gubernatorial elections, no female governor emerged in any of the states. Only two female deputy governments emerged namely, Alhaja Sinatu Ojikutu of Lagos State and Mrs Cecilia Ekpeyong of Cross River State. In the senatorial elections held in 1992. Mrs Kofo Bucknor Akerele was the only women who won a seat in the Senate. Very few women won elections into the House of Representatives. One of these few was Chief (Mrs) Florence Ita-Giwa who won in the Calabar constituency under the banner of the National Republican convention (NRC). Amongst the members of the transitional council appointed by president Babangida in January 1993, only two were women, namely Mrs Emily, Aiiklmhokuede and Mrs Laraba Dagash.

In the Interim National Government (ING) of Chief Ernest Shonekan, two female ministers were appointed into the cabinet. General Abacha had a number of female ministers at various times in his cabinet including Chief. (Mrs) Onikepo Akande and Ambassador Judith Atta. During the Military Regime of General Abdulsalami Abubakar (June 9, 1998, May 29 1999) there were two women in the Federal Executive Council: Chief (Mrs) Onikepo Akande (Minister for Commerce), and Dr. Laraba Gambo Abdullahi (of Women Affairs).

In the Fourth Republic which started on May 29, 1999, the Nigerian political terrain witnessed an increase in the number of women political appointers, even though women did not perform well at the elections. In the elections held before May 29, 1999, few women emerged as chairpersons of local government councils. A number of women won elections as councilors. There was no female governor in any state of the Federation. Only Lagos State produced a deputy governor in the person of Senator Bucknor Akerele.

In the National Assembly, there were only three women in the Senate, namely: Chief. (Mrs.) Florence Ita Giwa representing Cross River State South Senatorial District: Mrs Stella Omu from Delta state and Hajiya Khairat Abdul-Razaq now Hijiya Gwadabe representing the Federal Capital Territory. Only 12 women made it to the House of Representative and these are Barrister Iquo Minimah, Mrs, Patience Ogodo, Lola Abiola Edewor, Patricia O. Etteh,

In the State Houses of Assembly, very few women emerged as members. While in some states, one or two women emerged in the Houses, most other states had virtually no female in their legislature. States like Cross River, Akwa Ibom, River, Lagos and many other did not have female members in their State Legislature.

Women have been appointed as commissioners and therefore members of the Executive Council in all the state have one female, others have two female in the Executive Councils. President Olusegun Obasanjo appointed a number of women into the Federal Executive Council while he served as President, they are Dr. (Mrs) Kema Chikwe, (Minister of Transport), Mrs. Dupe Adelaja (Minister of State Defence), Dr. (Mrs) Bekky Ketebu-Igwe (Minister of Solid Minerals), Dr (Mrs) Amina Ndalolo (Minister of Health), Mrs Pauline Tallen (Minister of State Science and Technology), Mrs Aishatu Ismaila (Minister of women Affairs), Chief (Mrs) Tililayo Ajanaku is the Special Adviser to the president on Women Affairs.

During the 2011 general elections an increased number of Nigerian women defied the odds, ‘stepped into the murky waters of politics’, aspired and contested for party’s primaries; many lost, yet a significant number compared to previous elections won the party’s primaries and contested for elective positions in the various political parties in the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. Female candidates constituted 9.1% of the total number of candidates who contested election into National Assembly in the 2011 general elections across all the political parties. There were 3306 candidates with men accounting for 3004 (90.9%) and women 302(9.1%) (Irabor,2011). Despite the many female aspirants, only few emerged as candidates and fewer of them emerged as winners at the polls. Unfortunately, the number and percentage of women who were successful at the polls in 2011 was less than the figure in 2007. Whereas, the 2007 figure was higher than the figure in the 2003 general elections; and the figure in 2003 as higher than the figure in the 1999 general elections. In 1999, the overall percentage of women was 2%; in 2003, it was 4% and in 2007 it was 6% (Eme,et.al,2008).

Although the number of female candidates increased for most of the elective positions, there was only 1 female presidential candidate in the person of Mrs Ebiti Ndok of the United National Party for Development. It is doubtful if she eventually voted given issues she had with the administration of justice system. It should be noted that Sarah Jubril (NCAA,2011) was a presidential aspirant under the platform of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). She lost at the party’s primaries. There were 4 female vice-presidential candidates, namely y were Rose Yakubu of the African Renaissance Party (ARP), Kadijat B. Abubakar of the Better Nigeria Progressive Party (BNPP), Binutu Fela Akinola of Fresh Democratic Party (FRESH) and Bilikisu Ismo Magogo of the National Transformation Party (NTP) (Sun Editorial,2011).

Whereas, there are 36 governorship seats less than 36 states were due for governorship elections at the April 26, 2011 governorship elections. This was due to the fact that some governors did not commence their term on May 29, 2007 as they had to wait for a court order to declare them winners of the 2007 governorship election (Eme,2008). The court’s decision was pronounced some years after other governors took their oath of office. Consequently, their 4 year tenure started running on the day they took their oath of office which was not May 29, 2007. Amongst these States were Edo, Ekiti, Osun and Anambra States (Eme,2008).

Governor Peter Obi’s second term as governor of Anambra State started running in 2010 because he took the oath of office as governor in 2006, in respect of the governorship
election he contested in 2003, only after the Court of Appeal declared him winner of the election in 2006. He won a second term in the 2010 governorship election in Anambra State. Consequently, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) (Eme, 2008) did not conduct elections in such states.

There were 348 governorship candidates contesting elections for governorship seats across the Federation. 13 (3.7%) out of the 348 governorship candidates were women and they contested in 10 states namely Benue, Delta, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Kano, Kebbi, Kwara, Oyo and Plateau. Their names and parties were “Emilia Uba, Omaliko African Democratic Congress (ADC); Victoria Azaber Pausu, All Progressives Grand Congress (APGA); Dame Gloria Obi, African Democratic Congress (ADC); Princess Esther Nwodo-Agbo, People’s Redemption Party (PRP); Nkechi Offor, African Liberation Party (ALP); Scolastica Emerole, Action Party of Nigeria (APN); Okorokwo Precious, Better Nigeria Progressive Party (BNPP); Ihemadu Nkemdika, Fresh Democratic Party (FRESH); Hajia Musa Yakassi, Action Party of Nigeria (APN); Hauwa Mohammed, African Democratic Congress (ADC); Gbemisola Saraki-Fowora, Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN); Dada Fatima, Mega Peoples Progressive Party (MPP); Paullen Tallen, (Labour Party)”(Irabor, 2011). None of these women were successful at the elections which means that to date Nigeria, is yet to produce a female executive governor of a State except for the brief period that Dame Virginia Etiaba held forth for Governor Peter Obi of Anambra State when he had some political challenges that led to Dame Virginia Etiaba being sworn in as governor. Dame Virginia Etiaba was the deputy governor to Governor Peter Obi. It appears some parties agreed to adopt female deputy governorship candidates.

Consequently, there was generally an increase in the number of male governorship candidates that had women as their deputies. At least, four parties in Lagos State chose women to contest as deputy governors (Eme, et.al, 2008). In 1999, only Lagos State had an elected female deputy governor in the person of Mrs Kofoworola Akerele-Bucknor although she was later removed and replaced by Femi Pedro, a man as a result of party intrigues probably informed/influenced by patriarchy. In 2003 the number of deputy female governors increased to 2 (5.5%), in 2007 it increased to 6(16.6%). The 2011 general elections produced only a female deputy governor in the person of Mrs Adejoke Orelope Adefulire of Lagos State who contested under the platform of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) (The Punch, 2011).

Some of the female candidates contested against heavy weights. A case in point is Plateau State where Paullen Tallen (Labour Party) contested against political heavyweights such as Joshua Dariye who was governor from 1999-2006 (Eme, et.al, 2008), Ibrahim Mantu who was once Deputy Senate President, Fidelis Tapgun () and the incumbent governor Jonah Jang(). Senator Gbemisola Saraki-Fowora (ACPN) who contested for the governor’s seat in Kwara State had ethical and religious issues to contend with in addition to contesting against the PDP’s candidate which also pitched her against her brother who is the incumbent governor of the State also of the PDP.

Quite a number of women won their parties’ primary ticket for the National Assembly and the various States’ Houses of Assembly. In Lagos State all the female candidates from ACN won at the polls in the election into the National Assembly and the State House of Assembly. Women contested for only 7(17.5%) seats out of the 40 seats at the Lagos State House of Assembly. Adamawa State which had 23 women vying for political offices managed to produce only three female winners, they include Hajiya Aishatu, Mrs Wale Fwa and Mrs Wilbina Jackson.

Out of the 109 Senators who emerged winners at the 2011 polls, only 7 (6.4%) were women. The successful candidates are Nkechi J. Nwaogu, Mrs. Helen U. Esuene, Nenadi Usman, Aisha Jummai all of PDP. Others include Christiana N.O. Anyanwu (Irabor, 2011),
Joy Emordi both of APGA and lastly Chief (Mrs) Oluremi Tinubu of ACN. The notable casualties included Senator Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello, Senator Daisy Danjuma and Kema Chikwe. The decrease in the percentage of female candidates that won at the polls is disturbing given the increase in the number of women who contested and the figure dropped significantly when compared to the performance of women in previous elections.

In the 2007 general elections, 9(8.25%) female candidates won the senatorial seats. They were Gbemisola Saraki-Fowora (Kwara State), Christiana Anyanwu (Imo State), Zainab Kure40(Niger State), Grace Bent (Adamawa State), Joy Emordi41 (Anambra State), Eme Ufot Ekaete (Akwa Ibom State), Patricia Akwashiki (Nasarawa State), Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello (Ogun State), Nkechi Justina Nwaogu (Abia State).42 In the 2003 elections there were 4(3.67%) female senators. whilst in the 1999 general elections there were only 3(2.75%) female senators namely Chief (Mrs.) Florence Ita-Giwa who won on the platform of ANPP representing Cross River State South Senatorial District; Mrs. Stella Omu who won on the platform of PDP from Delta State and Hajiya Khairat Abdul Razaq (now Hajiya Gwadabe) who also won on the platform of PDP representing the Federal Capital Territory.

The drop in the number of successful female contestatnts is worrisome. Senator Grace Bent an indigene of Ilesha, Osun State, South West Nigeria but married to an indigene of Adamawa State and elected into the Senate in 2007 under the platform of PDP, could not pick the ticket at the party’s primaries in 2011. First timers like Prof Dora Akunyili could not sail to the senate as she lost to Dr. Chris Ngige whilst Ms Jumoke Akinjide43 also lost in Oyo State. Whereas another first timer Chief (Mrs) Oluremi Tinubu won the Lagos Central Senatorial seat under the platform of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). Chief (Mrs) Oluremi Tinubu is the wife of one of the chieftains of CAN, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu().

It is believed that any candidate in Lagos State contesting under the platform of ACN should consider the election a walkover because Lagos is a profound and traditional stronghold of the ACN. The writer expresses concern whether this actually gives room for the most suitable aspirant to vie for party’s primaries, win the primaries and contest election given the influence of ‘god fatherism’ in Nigeria’s politics. Female performance in the House of Representatives election was no less different from that of the Senate. A significant drop of successful female candidates was also recorded.

Out of the 360 available seats women won only 19 (5.27%). This is an abysmal drop in the light of the success recorded in 2007, 2003 and 1999 where the figures were respectively 27(7.5%), 21(5.8%) and 12(3.3%). The table below captures the position of women in electoral positions between 1999-2011.

**Table 1: Comparism of Women Representation in 1999, 2003, & 2011 General Elections**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>No of Available seats</th>
<th>No of Women Elected &amp; % of Total in 1999</th>
<th>No of women Elected &amp; % of Total in 2003</th>
<th>No of women Elected &amp; % of Total in 2007</th>
<th>No of women Elected &amp; % of Total in 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Presidency</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0%</td>
<td>-0%</td>
<td>-0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>3-2.75%</td>
<td>4-3.7%</td>
<td>8-7.33%</td>
<td>7-6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>House of Representative</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>12-3.33%</td>
<td>21-5.83%</td>
<td>23-6.38%</td>
<td>26-7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Governorship</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>-0%</td>
<td>-0%</td>
<td>-0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Deputy Governorship</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>-0%</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>1-0.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>State Houses of Assembly</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>12-1.21%</td>
<td>38-3.84%</td>
<td>54-5.45%</td>
<td>68-6.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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From the foregoing, it is evident that only very few Nigerian women have participated and emerged in Nigeria’s political landscape, in spite of the pioneering efforts of women like Funmilayo Ransome Kuti and Margaret Ekpo since the 50s. Today, the number of women in top job is still insignificant. As the 2011 elections approaches it is expected that it is expected that women should begin to build war chest, to advance their agenda and must be ready to support party activities and fund women who are actively seeking political offices.

**Strategies for Enhancing the Status of Women in Electoral Politics in Nigeria**

The challenges female politicians encounter on their way to political participation could be daunting, but they are encouraged as citizens not to be dissuaded and to insist that they have a voice in the 2011 elections. As generally practiced across the globe, patriarchy gives ascendancy to men in politics, authority and decision-making in and outside the home. It is significant that these male-centred structures should be softened to ensure equal access to politics and decision-making.

There is a need for mass mobilization campaigns about the need to break traditional attitudes and stereotypes of women’s roles and in equity with men in order to ensure egalitarian principles to promote early socialization. Few women in top political and administrative positions need to exhibit positive role modeling and mentoring to encouraged up-coming women in politics and administrative positions. These few women should use their positions in the organizational hierarchy to promote legislations, policies that will enhance access of other women to politics and decision-making positions.

Again, there is a need for affirmative action across a broad front to remove the continuing obstacles to the career progress of women as well as reduces a historic unbalance in politics, decision-making, recruitment, staff development and promotion. Furthermore, international and national non-governmental organizations and funding agencies across the globe should exhibit more interest in promoting collaborative research on various dimensions of women’s citizenship to attain genuine equally between men and women to the policy process.

Also Nigerian governments should commit themselves to establishing the goal of gender balance in political parties, governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administrative agencies with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men in politics and decision-making. The Nigerian constitution and Electoral Act should be arranged to incorporate affirmative action principles by inserting a new subsection that will provide for at least thirty percent affirmative action for women which will address the imbalances and injustices against women. Finally, there is a need for consistent political participation and engagement in leadership activities and training to overcome women’s low political socialization in Nigeria.

**Conclusion**

Party politics and governance throughout post-colonial Nigeria has been marked by a striking exclusion and marginalization of women. Though major changes have occurred in the status of women in Nigerian politics and in decision-making, the role of women continues to be “home-centred”, thus excludes public activities and political life. The perception of female as inferior half of humanity has had a very serious implication on the development of women and the society itself. The fact that in all religions, histories and indeed in all societies the woman is considered as being inferior to the man does not justify gender inequality. The
reawakening that started around the 1970s and 1980s has proven good enough to show that
the woman, also a creature of God, should be allowed rights and latitudes enjoyed by her
male counterpart. Particularly in politics and leadership, the worth and contributions of
women must be recognized. This is because discrimination against women has sufficed for
ages and change will not be sharp and sudden. In so far as small roles, which include the
constellation of norms, values, attitudes and actions are accepted, they will continue to
inhabit women from participating actively in politics and in decision-making.

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