

Historicizing Women's Political Participation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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1.0 ABSTRACT

In Nigeria as a political landscape, women are still holding least positions and playing fringe roles in political institutions, processes, matters and claims. This paper titled Historicizing Women's Political Participation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic is anchored on the Social role theory. It posits that men and women expected behaviour in all social settings is a consequence of socialisation in gender stereotypes and gender roles. We employed desk approach for relevant materials which provides bases for conclusion and recommendations. In the Pre-Colonial era in Nigeria, women were monarchs, warriors, entrepreneurs, producers of herbs and medicine, policy makers and tutor of cherish values in traditional political institution. In the Colonial, and Post-Independence (democracy and military interregnum) eras, history, however, bears witness that women lost their political relevance and are relegated to background position in politics. There are major factors against women progress in the Nigeria's politics which are historical, structural and psychological. Women's activism and representation in public offices in the Fourth Republic reveals that women's political participation is spectatorial and transitional. Since party structure and government institutions are dominated by the male gender, civil society organizations promoting women in politics need to double their efforts.

Keywords: Democracy; Fourth Republic; Political History; Political Participation; Women

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Democracy is considered illegitimate when it is not a representation of gender equity and equality of participation (Desposato & Norrander, 2009). Similarly, Van Deth (2016, p. 2) notes that a political system is judged whether it is democratic or not on the basis of "extent and scope of political participation". Popular participation, thus, is critical to democracy. Gender inequality is real and persists in almost all human endeavours - politics is not an exception. According to Ki Moon (2011), "Women hold up more than half the sky and represent much of the World's unrealised potentials." Consistent with popular belief, gender-gap in terms of political participation is a global phenomenon (Oladapo et al., 2021; Desposato & Norrander, 2009; United Nations Development Program, 2022). In addition, some scholars argue that from time immemorial where colour, race, sex, tradition/culture and religion play a role in proportion of share from State privileges including political participation, growth in all dimensions is "painfully slow" (Odionye & Ofoego, 2016,) growth and development are receptive of open participation in decision-making process.

This is particularly prevalent in the developing political set-up, limiting women's full participation in all aspects of society, including politics. Specifically in Africa and in particular Nigeria as a political landscape, women are still holding least positions and playing fringe-worthy roles in political institutions, processes, matters and claims. For instance, Ake et al., (2019) have argued that participation in the political processes in Nigeria is a patriarchal domination since the colonial era. In light of this, they argue that "Nigerian women have encountered a number of problems while venturing into politics" (Ake et al., 2019, p 21). In this period, for instance, they argued that women were not recognised to vote, particularly in the Northern part of Nigeria not until 1979; that is about Eight (8) years later, 1960, than when the women in the southern part of the same country, Nigeria, began to exercise their suffrage right to vote. Reinforcing traditional world view of an average African man, former President of Nigeria, Muhammad Buhari, further discounted the relevance of women in public positions when he posited that his wife does not belong to any political party but the other room (Oladapo et al., 2021). Awofeso and Odeyemi (2014) earlier echo this view "a woman's place is in the home where she is expected to care for her husband and children and not to be rubbing shoulders with the male gender in politics (p. 109).

Olugbemi (2004 cited in Ake et al., 2019), however, observes that women's political engagement, interaction and activism in Nigeria democratic setup has slightly improved in the Fourth Republic compare to what was obtained in the Pre-colonial, Colonial and Post-colonial (First Republic, Second Republic, Military Era, and Third Republic) political dispensations. Although, women are still significantly underrepresented in formal political structures in Nigeria, their number and impact are on the increasing trajectory with the return of democracy since 1999. Thus, Nigeria as a democratic State still subtly promotes patriarchal politics in this 21st Century; the political processes pool is still being dominated and controlled by the male gender. The gender political relations in Nigeria are tilted towards the male gender (Oladapo et al., 2021).

Attesting to the patriarchal nature of Nigeria politics, under the Obasanjo-lead Administration in 2003 election, three (3) female Senators out of 109 Senators and twenty-one (21) female Reps, of which Eight (8) were re-elected, out of the 360 Reps, were elected. This is a reflection of politics as the male gender exclusive reserve in Nigeria (Ake et al., 2019). Deep and careful observations (Ake et al., 2019; Olugbemi, 2004) into the political history of Nigeria reveals that women have not been regarded as equally capable of holding important leadership positions either in the public or private leadership spheres; this attitude may be attributed to cultural bias towards the women folk. Hence, the male domination of elective and appointed offices and claims may have found fertility in socio-cultural, economic, education and religious factors.

Despite some progress recently, women's political participation and representation in Nigeria's politics placed side by side with their male counterparts is still minimal (Awofeso & Odeyemi, 2014; Odionye & Ofoego, 2016). Against this backdrop, this paper draws its focus from these questions, how has women's political participation evolved in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, and what factors pose threat to their interest and involvement in the Nigeria's political space. In addition, what are the relevant efforts made in the Fourth Republic targeted at promoting women's interest, representation, engagement and claim in the Nigeria political space?

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Discourse

Political Participation

In an attempt to capture detailed history of women's political participation, Desposato & Norrander, (2009) opined that voting during election, expressing opinions and involvement in political party activities are most popular conventional political participation while non-conventional participation includes boycotting and political apathy. The International Encyclopaedia of Political Science (Vol. XIII) describes political participation as voluntary, rather than coercive, engagement of citizens in the political affairs of their country. They are not only aware but actively engaged in deciding an individual or group of individuals who will guide and direct their common political destiny without fear of punishment. This voluntary participation is associated with democracy. For instance, engaging in canvassing for votes, vote casting, providing financial support to political groups and party, and engaging in party electioneering activities for public offices. However, political scholars agree that beyond democratic polity, political participation is coercive. For instance, in authoritarian, fascist and communist polities, it is generally involuntary. In a similar sense, Ruedin (2007) conceptualizes political participation as "political support and electoral activities" way and above voting and opines that these activities, contrary to common beliefs, are influenced by political institutions and social capital.

Political participation involves political behaviour of people such as campaigning, financial contributions, attending of meetings and voting and process to direct the political life of people towards active participation in politics (Milbrath, 1981). It was corroborated by Carole (2015) as a process through which a group of individuals with similar political interests seeking to influence public policy register a political party, and contesting to win public offices; registering as members of political parties, contesting for elective public offices, and providing financial and material supports to political parties. As an opportunity, it involves engaging in political discussions and debates by individuals or groups, and vote casting by individuals. Within this broad conceptualisation of political participation, Oladapo et al. (2021, p.10) describe it as "representation in political institutions, participation in the electoral process, and specific forms of civic action".

Although representation in the elective public offices is dominated by the male gender, the gender gap or differential in the electoral process such as voting is shrinking in the recent time, particularly in the established democracies such as the United Kingdom, the United State of America and Canada, in some of the young democracies in Latin America and Africa (Oladapo et al., 2021; Desposato & Norrander, 2009). Some scholars argue that limiting electoral participation to vote casting on election days is narrow and hence, underestimates political participation. In actuality, voting process includes pre-election day activities such as voters biometric capturing, collection of permanent voters-card, political campaign and accreditation. All these and more are part of voting process that guarantee voters to exercise their suffrage right. In this sense, political participation is broadly captured.

Unlike other scholars, Dim and Asomah (2019) narrowly conceptualized political participation as making claims on government. For instance, demanding a stop to all forms of discrimination against women in the society; gender equity and equality (gender inclusion) and promote women-centric initiatives. To them, other recognized aspects of political participation such as "voting in elections, working for a candidate or party, and attending political campaign rallies" (Oladapo et al., 2021, p. 10; Desposato & Norrander, 2009), and seeking election and appointment into political offices as irrelevant. In this article, however, political participation is beyond the narrow conceptualization. Hence, political participation is conceptualized as competing for public and party offices and a conscious share (starting with loyalty to a party and its candidate, vote cast and support to party victory) in selection or election of individual or group of individual ruler(s) who decide public policies that steer a political society towards common goals.

Thus, there are two set of individuals or groups in politics, particularly in a democratic environment. They are the politically conscious-active and the politically apathetic. The politically apathetic are a set of citizens who deliberately distance themselves from political activities and demonstrate aversion for political discussions. However, the politically activist demonstrate cognition, belief, enthusiasm and engagement in political activities and discussions (Milbraith, 1981). It is important to mention that even among the political activist; the dimension of participation in political processes varies. Hence, Milbraith differentiated political activism or participation into spectatorial, transitional and gladiatorial levels.

Nature of Political Participation

Gladiatorial participation is accordingly involved holding public or party offices, canvassing for party funds, and contesting at election. These political activities across liberal democracies occur at the top-end of power pyramid. In the Nigeria context, however, the gladiatorial space is conducive and accommodates the male gender, but is hostile to the female gender due to historical, structural and psychological factors. Since the 1960 of independence till date, Nigeria has not recorded a woman as the substantive President, Governor or Senate President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. However, the highest political office that women have occupied in the history of Nigeria's politics was the Speaker of the House of Representative in 2007 by Olunmi Patricia Etteh (Awofeso and Odeyemi, 2014).

In Nigeria, the story is almost diametrically opposite to the global trend. Transitional participation is accordingly involved activities like attending political caucus meetings, party rallies, providing financial supports to political parties and lobbying policies. In this category, the number of women in politics is relatively more than at the gladiatorial level. Yet, the gender gap at this stage is still staggering. Some scholars have argued that this may be attributed to the gender traditional roles in Nigeria. For instance, the female gender is expected to be the mother of the house whose responsibility is to provide care for children and husband. However, it is a few among them who is free and perhaps bold and confident dare gender stereotype and possibly oscillate between the base level (spectatorial participation) and midlevel participation or transitional politics. According to Okoronkwo-Chukwu (2013 cited in Awofeso & Odeyemi, 2016, p. 108), "creates a sense of apathy in the women and explains the reason why they are more comfortable as voters, mobilizers, praise singers and supporters to male candidates."

Spectatorial participation is the base level participation in the political participation pyramid (Milbraith, 1965). At this level, the percentage of women in politics is relatively more than at the higher levels of transitional and gladiatorial participations. This stage involves wearing of party badges, caps, uniforms or emblems, running errands for political leaders, engaging in political discussions, voting at elections, and branding personal cars and trucks in party logos. Hence, the gender gap is glaringly clear in the Nigeria context. At best, women in their large number serve as disposable tool that are mobilized for electioneering and electoral victory of the male counterparts in Nigeria (Agbalajobi & Agunbiade, 2016). During campaign grounds and rallies, they come out in their large numbers to dance and sing praises of male candidates vying for public offices with compensation of one Mudu or Kongo of rice and two sachets of 75g noodles.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is anchored on the social roles theory as a framework that aids our understanding of the historical roles of women in the struggle for political participation in the Nigeria political context.

Social Roles Theory

The social role theory is a theory in Social Psychology propounded by Eagly H. Alice in 1987 in her work titled: "Sex Differences in Social Behavior: a Social Role Interpretation". The theory basically argues that differences in terms of labor division and behavioral divergence between men and women, boys and girls are the offshoot of interaction between social and biological influences (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Thus, the social role theory traces the historical genesis of gendered traits and traditional gender roles to socialization processes in human societies and biological division of human being into binary sexes (male and female). In this sense according to Schneider and Bos, (2019, p. 175) "gendered traits and stereotypes develop as a result of the differential roles that men and women occupy in society".

In this case, men are described as agentic (independent, competent, wealthy, aggressive, assertive and competitive) whereas women are described as communal (emotional sensitive, socio-emotionally intelligent and caring); they are born into socially defined roles which they are not expected to challenge, but rather fit into these roles as socially prescribed (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly & Sczesny, 2019). For instance, men are strong while women are considered weak. Hence, men take up roles in the preindustrial societies such as hunting and laboring in the public sphere while women cared for children and husband and maintained home life. In the industrial age too, the physical demands of child-bearing and upbringing prevent women from entering the paid economy, leaving men free to develop skills in this domain and occupy leadership positions (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

Through their unique physical capabilities, which allowed them to participate in economic production, men acquired both greater resources and greater power compared to women (Wood & Eagly, 2012; Schneider & Bos, 2019). As a result of occupying different roles, most women developed the communal traits necessary to be successful in caring for others, whereas most men developed the agentic traits applicable to their roles as farmer, worker, and eventually, leader. The process of socialization reinforces these traits as men and

women are expected to behave in ways traditionally associated with their sex (Wood & Eagly, 2012). Moreover, observing men and women in different roles helps develop gender-based stereotypes that most women possess communal traits and men possess agentic traits because people assume that men and women possess the traits necessary for success in those roles (Wood & Eagly, 2012; Player et al., 2019).

In the Nigeria leadership and political contexts, women are often discriminated against. Their potentials for leadership are less likely to receive consideration when hiring for leadership positions either in the public domain or private domain (Player, et al., 2019). They are often seen through the communal lens as soft, empathetic and mother who should not be, seen, or heard in the public domain or competing with men for positions of leadership. Politics is for the brave, and hence, only men are believed to possess this trait. Thus, women are not expected to interrupt gender stereotypes in order to avoid social backlash. For instance, Awofeso and Odeyemi, (2014), Odionye and Ofoego (2016) agree that female gender is stereotyped as inferior to their male counterpart across the African continent. It is therefore unsurprising that Nigeria is patriarchal; the male gender is accorded the top spot on the social hierarchy while the female gender occupies the base spot. In this sense, there seem unwritten social and political roles which are considered beyond women's reach in Nigeria.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted desk approach or descriptive method (secondary sources) for relevant materials on historicizing women's political participation in Nigeria's fourth republic which provides bases for conclusion and recommendations. The desk approach involves the gathering of relevant and essential data from existing sources such as journal, articles, newspaper, reports, and books. The gathered information were analyzed and served as a foundation for critical thinking and plausible recommendations.

1.5 FINDINGS

Historical Analysis of Women Political Participation in Pre-Colonial/Colonial and Post Independence Era in Nigeria.

Africa women played important roles in the political processes of their pre-colonial societies. In fact available records reveal that respected political offices were not out of their convenient reach (Awofeso and Odeyemi, 2014). For instance, women who held high political positions and respected generalissimos included but not limited to Moremi of Ile-Ife, the Iyalode of Ibadan, Efunsetan Aniwura from the southern Nigeria, and the Queen Amina of Zaria from the Northern Nigeria. They occupied positions and performed specific roles such as freedom fighter, military leader, queen, wealthy traders, mercenaries, warlords, and traditional ruler (Ibrahim, 2019). Women occupied and held title such as Mardani, Magajiya and Iya. Amina of Zazzu became a military commander and warlord in the pre-colonial Northern Nigeria (Modibbo, et al., 2020). Women from both southern and Northern part of the country experienced spectatorial, transitional and a little bit of gladiatorial level of political participation in the pre-colonial era.

The fortune of women in politics, however, took a nose-dive turn with the arrival of colonialism in African and their accompanying anti-women policies (prioritize male education over female and promote economy opportunities in factory and cash-crop farming for men, but women were neglected to manage the home front). Colonialism fully supported patriarchy in African – "the rule by men" (Heywood, 2007 cited in Awofeso and Odeyemi, 2014, p. 105). This is because the stranglehold of men folk on political processes supported by colonial bias against women is not up for argument. According to Awofeso and Odeyemi (2014), Oladapo et al., (2021), and Ake et al. (2019) agree that from the colonial time to the modern day politics, the patriarchal nature of Nigeria was draining political aspiration and strength of the women politicians in Nigeria. For instance, they note that since 1960 that Nigeria is recognized as a Sovereign State a woman has neither been elected president, vice president nor governor. The highest elective office they have attained in this country is Deputy Governorship. The above submission showcase that the colonialism in Nigeria did not give room for women political participation in both southern and northern Nigeria. The southern women were relegated to political spectators, house wife and custodian of culture while the Northern women were in door due to religion and majority political spectators.

Women's participation in Post Independence politics from 1960 to 1998, both in the democratic dispensations and the military interregnum, was minimal in terms of involvement. Ake et al. (2019) rightly note that the 1960 political Independence of Nigeria was not able to remedy the gender gap in the Nigeria politics. The gender gap trend that was set in motion during the colonial era continued during the post-Independent era in the Nigeria's politics. This was corroborated by Oladapo. et al., (2021) that despite the low level of elected women in public offices, it remains factual that women from the Southern Nigeria recorded higher number elected representatives than Northern women in Nigeria in House of Assembly, House of representative and senate in the post independence politics.

Women Political Participation in Nigeria Fourth Republic: 1999 - 2024

Despite discrimination and violence against women in the Nigeria political space, the Nigerian women have continued to engage in politics and seek election and appointment into public and party offices in different election cycles since the return of the Fourth Republic in 1999. Their political interest and engagement is, thus, beyond spectatorial level – it is neck deep into the gladiatorial level (Ake et al., 2019). This reflects the determination, consciousness and resilience of Nigeria women to make their voice heard and continues to maintain their indelible mark on the Nigeria political landscape.

Obasanjo-led Administration saw women elected and appointed into high decision-making offices and political institutions. In 2003, the National Assembly welcomed Four (4) female Senators, Twenty-three (23) female Reps and Two (2) females emerged as deputy governors in Nigeria. Still, the First Constitutional and electoral Review under this Administration in 1999 included four (4) females out of the twenty-four (24) members. Similarly, among the delegates to National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) in 2005, the Female delegates were less than 8 per cent (30 out of the 400 delegates). In this Administration's first tenure in office, Nine (9) women as both advisers and ministers were appointed out of the Forty-four (44) ministers (Ake et al., 2019).

Yar'Adua Government recorded increased female political reawakening, engagement, electoral victory and appointment. For instance, in the 2007 election cycle, more than 1200 women expressed interests in various political offices both at the national and state levels. Out of this figure, about 660 female contestants in the party primaries defeated their male counterpart to win parties tickets for the general election. However, 94 contestants emerged winners (Deputy Governors: 6, Senators: 9, House of Representative members: 27 and House of Assembly members: 52). Out of the 27 female members of the House of Representatives, Patricia Olubunmi Etteh, for the first time in the political record of Nigeria, emerged as the Speaker of the House of Representatives in Nigeria. This is a landmark in the political anal of Nigeria. Furthermore, during the electioneering, Yar'Adua as the Peoples Democratic Party's Presidential Candidate promised to increase women appointment to ministerial positions and eventually, his victory at the poll saw the appointment of Seven (7) female to ministerial offices in Nigeria (Ake et al., 2019).

Likewise under the Goodluck E.Jonathan-led Administration in 2011, women enjoyed a fair level playing ground in the President's appointment of ministers. In the President's promise to guarantee 35% women representation in his Government, factors such as gender, ethno-religion, and socio-economic status were relegated and hence, chosen ministers on the basis of merit – his Government appointed 13 female ministers out of the 41 ministers in his cabinet (Ake et al., 2019); that is more than 31% of the ministerial slots were grabbed by the female gender (Awofeso & Odeyemi, 2014). As a commitment to improve women political engagement across political boards (Federal, State and Local levels) in Nigeria, the Women for Change Initiative was launched by the President's wife, Dame Patience Jonathan. In the same vein, the President emboldened the female gender to pursue their dreams in any area of human endeavours in these words: "Women should brace up to be all they want to be in life as this administration will be an enabler of their progress" (Ake et al., 2019, p 24).

Under the Muhammad Buhari's Government, two term tenure of four (4) years each, Nigeria recorded 5.6% women out of 359 and 3.1% women out of 360 in the House of Representatives in 2015 and 2019 respectively. Also, 6.4% women out of 109 and 7.3% women out of 109 members at the Senate in 2015 and 2019 respectively (Kelly, 2019). Furthermore, in the ministerial position, the women position fell short of the number they enjoyed under the Goodluck Jonathan's Administration. During the First (2015) and Second (2019), terms in office of the President Buhari, women occupied 17% of the 36 ministerial posts and 16% of the 44 ministerial posts respectively. Worthy of mention here, women through the 100 Women Lobby Group (100WLG) demonstrated their displeasure, and alleged the President, Buhari, of deceit during his campaign tours in 2015 to respect the affirmative action. According to Ajayi (2016, p. 4), the North central coordinator of the group, Mrs. Anne Addeh insisted that the president is on record during his campaign where he pledged 35% affirmative action for women in governance in line with the national gender policy (2006) while his party APC's manifesto also promises equitable gender inclusiveness. Change that is being unveiled in Nigeria is incomplete if it is inequitable and non-inclusive.

The President Bola Tinubu-led Administration allotted 19.2% of the 47 ministerial posts to women. According to the Business Day (2023, August 2) online report, the female ministerial nominees are Hannatu Musawa, Betta Edu, Doris Aniche Uzoka, Nkiru Onyeojiocha, Stella Okotete, Uju Kennedy Ohaneye, Iman Suleiman, Maryam Shetty and Lola Ade-John.

Nigerian Women elected in between 1999 – 2023

s/n	Position	Available seats	No. of women in 1999	No. of women in 2003	No. of women in 2007	No. of women in 2011	No. of women in 2015	No. of women in 2019	No. of women in 2023
1	Presidency	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	Governorship	36	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	Senate	109	3(2.8%)	4(3.7%)	9(8.3%)	7(6.4%)	7(6.4%)	7(6.4%)	3(2.7%)
4	House of Representative	360	12(3.3%)	21(5.8%)	26(7.2%)	25(7.2%)	22(5.2%)	11(3.5%)	16(4.4%)
5	States House of Assembly	990	24(2.4%)	40(4.4%)	57(6.9%)	68(6.9%)	54(4.6%)	40(4.4%)	48(4.7%)
	Total	1496	28(1.8%)	68(4.5%)	94(6.2%)	99(6.6%)	80(5.3%)	58(3.7%)	67(4.4%)

Source: Authors compilation

In addition, the above table indicated that women political participation in Nigeria is mostly in between the transitional and spectatorial categories. It was recorded that no single woman occupies the position of a president and governor in Nigeria since the beginning of the fourth republic in 1999 till 2025. This showcases the little or lack of involvement of women at the gladiatorial level of political participation and governance in Nigeria. Moreover, there has been a reduction in elected women in public offices across Nigeria. House of Representatives have 4.4% of the 360 members as female lawmakers, while in the Senate; their number is 2.8% (Business Day, 2023, July 10).

Challenges to Women Political Participation in Nigeria

Studies (Ake et al., 2019; Awofeso and Odeyemi, 2014) reveal that in the Nigeria's political environment, the higher the power pyramid the lesser are the chances of women in the gladiatorial politics. Thus the female gender is seen as peripheral political animal who hardly go beyond spectatorial stage on the power pyramid. Broadly, issues such as perception, historical, structural, psychological, socio-economic, socio-cultural and religious reasons are recognised as part of the challenges against women politicians rise on the political ladder. Political scholars like L. W. Milbraith (1965), M. L. Goel (1977) have argued that participation in the political processes is directly linked to the level of political awareness. Hence, evidences reveal that Nigerian women's superficial political awareness and interest have hindered their participation in politics dated back into the pre-colonial era.

Historical factors: Politics in liberal democracies, Awofeso and Odeyemi (2014), and Adeleke (2015) argue, is an open competition for power with free entry and free exist across the gender divide. Thus, participation in political activities for public decision-making offices and influencing policy initiatives is open to all and sundry qualified citizens regardless of their gender class. However, in African specially and Nigeria inclusive, tradition is recognised as one of the major historical frictions slowing down political progress of the female gender in Nigeria political environment. For instance, gender-bias cultural norms and practices have roots in human societies from Ancient Rome, Ancient Hebrew to modern societies. Like other scholars of gender and political participation agree, the life cycle of the female gender is subservient to the male gender (Kelly, 2019).

Structural factors: Nigeria is patriarchal, since the male gender is accorded importance and respect in all social dimensions including politics. The female gender is treated as second class citizen to the male gender. These belief and practice discourage the female gender from wanting to go or compete with the male gender in politics because the social setting is favourable to the male to thrive in all dimensions including politics (Adeleke, 2015). In addition, violence such as physical, psychological and structural dimensions threaten women politicians to vie for elective offices in Nigeria. This is because the male gender are accustom to violence as the only sure way to electoral victory on the Nigeria's political environment and women of high calibre with interest in politics are not given to violence; hence, they distance themselves from politics. Their position often is that Nigeria politics is for demons in human form. Still under this category is the role of social economic status of the female gender. They rarely posses' financial independence strong enough to compete in a moneybag politics as is the case in Nigeria (Adeleke, 2015).

Psychological factors: studies (Awofeso and Odeyemi, 2014; Odionye and Ofoego, 2016) demonstrate with empirical evidences that female gender is stereotyped as inferior to their male counterpart across generations and cultures. This weighs down on their confidence and self-esteem to compete with the male gender class. They are thus discriminated against. Discrimination against women is defined by Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1979 as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex, which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women.

Efforts made to Encourage Women Political Participation in the Fourth Republic

There are growing efforts and initiatives both at the international and national political realms to protect women's rights and raise their political consciousness, interest, claim and engagement. Among which is a delegate of the Nigeria women in 1995 that attended the International Conference on Women in Beijing, China. Among core purposes of this Conference is to increase women representation in the elective offices by recommending a 35% affirmative action for women in their country's elective offices (Kelly, 2019). Nigeria as an active member of the United Nations ratified the 1952 Convention on the Political Rights of Women and in 1985 supported and ratified the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and similarly, endorsed the 2005 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

The Women for Change Initiative, under the Jonathan's Administration through the Office of the First Lady, Patience D. Jonathan, came into being as a movement with the primary aim of mobilizing women to take active interest in affirmative action, which is promoting women's empowerment and gender equality in the society (Odionye & Ofoego, 2016). The Women Political Empowerment was mainly facilitated by inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) saddled with raising women's consciousness, interest and engagement in public roles including politics. This is to improve the level of women involvement in Senate and House of Representative (IPU, 2022). The Nigerian Women Charter of Demand (NWCD) as the brainchild initiative of the Nigerian Women Trust Fund and the Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre push for two complementary goals to improve women's lot in leadership positions: (1) a reform of electoral law which guarantees the 1995 Beijing Affirmative Action 35% as a part of the criteria for political groups to be registered as a political party in Nigeria. (2) Incorporation of 35% women in all public sectors in Nigeria (Kelly, 2019; Orji, Orji, & Agbanyim, 2018).

The Voices for Change (V4C) as the UK Aid pet programme in Nigeria targets a pull down of structural barriers against achieving gender equality and justice in leadership positions in Nigeria. The structural barriers targeted for elimination include sexism, negative attitudes, and behaviours against the female gender and gendered social norms. Thus, it promotes gender justice at scale in Nigeria. The target audience of the V4C is young women and men between the ages of 16 to 25 years old. It seeks to positively influence gender reciprocal perceptions of this age group through the application of the social norms theory at scale – pushing for a change of social misperception of the female gender in Nigeria in other that the leadership positions in politics and industry open to the female gender and prevents violence against women and girls (DFID, 2017).

The Nigerian Women's Trust Fund (NWTF) works to help women into politics through funding, networking opportunities, mentoring, training for leadership, and advocacy. It is backed by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (MWASD), and the UN Women. In addition to various efforts of the Ministry of Women Affairs and women-centric civil society organizations in Nigeria, Nine civil society organisations in 2020 explored judicial means against the Federal Government of Nigeria to respect the National Gender Policy 2006 on 35% quota seats for women in public offices in Nigeria. Despite the Federal High Court, Abuja, upheld the National Gender Policy of 35% on April 2022 for women in public offices, the Buhari's and Tinubu's Governments respectively fall short of the National Gender Policy 2006 affirmative action of 35% in their nomination of female ministers in their cabinets respectively (BusinessDay, 2023, August 2).

The revised National Gender Policy 2021 – 2026 as a gender mainstreaming instrument at all levels of government and private business domain in Nigeria is targeted at achieving gender equality, women empowerment and social inclusivity. Its primary objective is to build a just society devoid of discrimination, where the needs and concerns of women, are mainstreamed equitably into all sectors of national development. Recognizing the sheer population of women/girls, put at more than 50% with vote strength more than half of voters population in Nigeria (UN Women, 2019), calls for addressing social injustices against women that closes gender gap in decision making, accessing and controlling resources and socio-economic opportunities (Ministry of Women and Gender Affairs, 2021).

1.6 CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

In the Pre-Colonial era in Nigeria, women held and played major roles custodian of custom, farmer, queen, warrior, trader and warlord. In the Colonial, Post-Independence (democracy and military interregnum) eras, history, however, bears witness that women lost their political relevance and were relegated to background position in politics. Thus, the political space became shrink and tense particularly against the female gender to fully express their political skill-set in the nation building project. This runs contrary to international and regional efforts to bridge gender gap in politics. In this regards is the 1995 Beijing Conference 35% initiative for women involvement.

This paper notes that there are reoccurring factors against women progress in the Nigeria's politics. These factors are broadly categorised as historical, structural and psychological. Thus, it is right time that policymakers across governance board (Federal, State and Local Governments) must look at the big picture when addressing the disturbing issue of low women participation in political processes. The nature of Nigerian women elected in political offices in the fourth republic showcase that women have been relegated to spectators and few women were seen at the transitional level. Comparatively, Nigeria as the most populous black nation in the world and giant on the Africa continent, the female gender has not had a fair share in the Nigeria's politics when placed beside countries such as Rwanda, South Africa, Cape Verde, and Namibia. The root of women's low political interaction, claim and representation was linked to historically patriarchal social system – where men stereotypical domination calls the short in leadership positions.

Since party structure and government institutions are dominated by the male gender, civil society organizations promoting women in politics need to double their efforts. This is with a view to force the political wheel of change in our political system that recognizes significant roles of women in democratic consolidation. Thus, a 35% quota seat at least must be exclusively reserved for women. In addition, there is a need for national re-orientation of the male gender's mindset against the female gender who ventures into politics. They need to internalise democratic principles and values which promote level playing ground for all human without discrimination and embrace the Articles 1 and 7 of the Universal Human Right Declaration as germane to democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

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