

## **Election Security and Women Political Participation in Nigerian Democratic System 1999-2023**

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### **Abstract**

**T**he transition to democracy has been marked with strenuous attempt and sacrifices that have left indelible marks that could remember for a very longer time in the political history of Nigeria. This may not be unconnected with hope and aspirations that greeted the project, how ever, a few years into democratic practice these hope and aspirations dashed out to such an extent that for the past two decades the Nigerian Democratic practices has been continuously declining in such an alarming rate that even the highest manifestation of democracy in term of election is waning thus can be seen from the trend of serious decline in voters attitudes towards registration and voting as well as in political activities in general. A survey of the trend successively reveals the clear picture from 2003 to 2023 where it is gloomier. This automatically has a very serious negative implication on democracy in general in the country. This paper assesses the level of women's political participation under the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria; and it also examines the ways elections security affects women political participation in Nigeria; and examine factors that shapes and influences women political participation both as electorates and candidates in Nigeria

**Keywords:** Elections, Security, Election Security, Political Participation, Election Violence

### **Introduction**

Elections has always been a central nerve of democratic system, because every function of the democratic system and governance, the fundamental human rights, policy formulations and implementation, and to some extent opposition, are all function of election, without which all other functions would not have been possible. Indeed, in essence election is a cornerstone of democratic system. In Nigeria despite the constitutional guarantee women political participation has been impeded by various sociopolitical and economic barriers that affect albeit negatively the mode of their participation and indeed the role they are expected to play in democratic system as a whole.

In view of the significance of election and the constraints being faced by women in the developing countries, that the United Nations (Nyamuguzuwe, 2009) recognizes the need to protect and promote the rights of women to participate in the electoral process, particularly in post conflicts countries. Electoral rights are much more than simply the right to vote, but encompasses freedom of expression, assembly and association, and the freedom to take part in the conduct of public affairs, hold public office at all levels of government, and participate in the formulation of government policy.

Similarly, the UN General Assembly (1979) CEDAW Resolution 34/180 Article 7 maintains that "state parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life of the country, and in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms

with men, the right: a) to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all public elected bodies; b) to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof, and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government; c) to participate in NGO's and Associations concerned with public and political life of the country.

In recent times, there are more women in public office than in any point in history across the world, more than 10,500 women serve as national parliamentarians in 2017, accounting for over 23% of total parliamentarians worldwide, millions of women politicians are serving at different capacities at national levels, and also active in electoral management position and as observers. Similarly, those vying for political office are increasing, also the number of women registered voters. However, still the number is low, resulting from a combination of various factors, among which violence against women in politics especially during elections proves much more pronounced (Ballington et al, 2017).

According to INEC (cited in Thomas-Odia, 2023) In Nigeria women accounted for 39.6 million (47.14%) of 84 millions registered voters in 2019, and 44.4 millions of (47.50%) of us 93.5 millions voters in 2023. However, in 2023 general elections only 10.1% were fielded by all political parties, and this indicates a decline of 2.80% in 2019. In a similar vein, Gender Strategy Advancement International (GSAI) contends that women political participation remains low at 6.70% in elective and appointment positions. This is far below the global average of 22.50%, an African regional average of 23.40%, and West African sub-regional average of 15%. Accordingly, Nigeria is just 4.1% in the national parliament, compare to Rwanda with 67% and Senegal with 57% (Thomas-Odia, 2023).

This paper assesses the level of women's political participation under the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria; and examines the ways elections security affects women political participation in Nigeria; it also examines factors that shapes and influences women political participation both as electorates and candidates in Nigeria. Documentary research is adopted as a methodology of the paper.

### **Elections Security and Political Participations in Democratic System**

Political Participation represents citizens' active involvement with public institutions, including voting, candidacy, campaigning, occupying political office, and or lobbying individually or through membership in a group (Rai, 2017). In the context of this paper, the concept of political participation is used in narrow or rather limited sense to refer to women political participation which implies women active engagement in formal political processes, involving party membership and leadership, voting, political contestation into various political posts and positions within the party, trade unions and civil society organizations, and as well as, at the levels of government: local, state and national, it also includes indirect or direct involvement in public debate and opposition on public opinions and policies, public association and demonstration among others.

According to A Guidelines for Public Security Providers in Elections (2017) Election Security refers to the protection of all stakeholders, activities and processes, election facilities and materials, and information, within the pre-electoral, electoral, and post-electoral periods from harm or threats of harm to facilitate peaceful and democratic elections.

Further, the Guidelines identified key elements of elections security as follows:

- i. Stakeholders: these comprise candidates; voters, election officials; representatives of the other states; institutions supporting elections; supporters of candidates and party members; media personnel; civil society representatives; and observers ( internal and external).
- ii. Activities and Processes: these include voters' registration; candidates' registration; campaign meetings; rallies and training of elections staff; voting, sorting and counting; tabulation; transfer of elections; materials; adjudication of complaints, and appeals and post-elections activities.
- iii. Facilities and Materials: these involve election administration premises (elections commission; voters' registration centres; polling stations; collation centres; storage facilities); relevant courts; party and candidates campaign materials and offices; allocated spaces for campaigning; and materials (in particular sensitive voting materials and equipments).
- iv. Communication System and information database containing voter, candidates or party information; relevant websites and communication systems including technologies (hardware, software and networks) used in voting, as well as counting, tabulation, and transmission of results.

### **The Trend of Women Political Participation in Nigerian Democratic System**

According to UNGA Resolution 66/130 /2012 (cited in Ballington, 2017, p 21-22) describes women political life to broadly include:

Women who directly or indirectly participate in different forms of political activity, including as elected or appointed politicians at national and local levels, members of political parties, candidates for election, voters, election staff, and political campaigners, activists and organizers, it may also include appointed officials such as government ministers, bureaucrats (municipal, provincial, regional, national)., and members of public boards, institutions, commissions, union members, community grass roots leaders and advocates.

"The participation of women in politics not only comprises interactions in elections, but also involves participation in trade unions, cooperatives, and women collectives, formal and informal politics (Rai, 2017).

It has been opined that women are generally under-represented in political offices worldwide, and this manifested more vividly in higher positions, and despite their professional and economic credentials and potentiality in political candidacy women demonstrate lower ambition to occupy executive offices than comparable to men, thus shy aware from political selections which is characterized by competition. The primary factor identify as reinforcing these tendencies are family influence and possibility of divorce (FROGEE Brief, 2021).

"Certain vulnerable groups such as women, internally displaced person IDP's, person with disabilities among others are adversely affected by threats, violence and intimidation, and as such tactics may be use to suppress their participation as candidates, supporters, or voters. In particular, they may be subject to hate speech, intimidation, or incitement to violence" (Guidelines for Public Security Providers in Elections, 2017, p16-17).

"Insecure or uncertain electoral environments have potential to exacerbate existing disparities and pose further obstacles to equal and effective participation and representation (Guidelines for Public Security Providers in Elections (2017)).

The Trend of Women Political Participation in Nigeria 1999-2011

		1999	2003	2007	2011	2015
Positions	No of Seats	No of Women (%)	No of Women (%)	No of Women (%)	No of Women (%)	No of Women (%)
President	1	0 (00%)	0 (00%)	0 (00%)	0 (00%)	
Vice President	1	0 (00%)	0 (00%)	0 (00%)	0 (00%)	
Senate	109	03 (2.75%)	4 (3.70%)	09 (8.30%)	07 (6.4%)	7(6.40%)
House of Representatives	360	12 (3.30%)	21 (6.10%)	26 (7.20%)	24 (6.70%)	19(5.20%)
Governor	36	0(00%)	0 (00%)	0 (00%)	0 (00%)	
Deputy Governor	36	1 (2.80%)	2 (5.6%)	6 (16.7%)	2 (5.6%)	
State House of Assembly	990	12 (1.21%)	38 (3.48%)	52 (5.25%)	69 (7.0 %)	
Local Government Chairman	774	9 (1.21 %)	15 (1.90%)	27 (3.60 %)	NA (NA%)	
Councillor	8810	143 (0.02%)	267 (4.20%)	235 (3.70%)	NA (NA%)	

Source: Poison (2012, p109) and Olugbemi (2015, p8), Quadri (2018, p266), Inter-parliamentary Union (Orji, 2018, p25).

In a similar vein, National Bureau of Statistics (2018) provides more comprehensive summary with regards to power and decision making proportion between men women in Nigeria 1999-2015

Positions	Male Proportion	Female Proportion
Presidency	100%	00%
Senate (Membership)	94.5%	5.5%
House of Representatives (Membership)	94.17%	5.83%
Judges of Federal Courts	70.62%	29.38%
State Assembly	94.71%	5.29%

Local Government Chairperson	91%	9%
Councillor	94.09%	5.91%
Governors	100%	00%
D/Governors	88.33%	11.66%
Senate President	100%	00%
Speakers House of Representatives	96.79%	3.21%
Speakers State House of Assembly	94.50%	5.5%
Heads of Civil Service (Federal)	75%	25%
Permanent Secretaries (Federal)	86%	14%
CBN Governors	100%	00%
Directors General	90%	10%
Special Advisers	77%	23%
Secretary _Government of the Federation	100%	00%
Ministers	84.02%	15.98%

**Source:** National Bureau of Statistics (2018).

### **Elections Security and Barriers against Women Political Participation in Nigerian Democratic System**

Women's representation in Nigerian politics has been on a downward slide since 2011, and in the 2023 elections, there were evidence of poor outcome, as the number of women in Nigeria's National Assembly has fallen by 19% compared to the last assembly, with women now occupying 3% of seats in the Senate and 4% the Federal House of Representatives (Nkereuwem, 2023).

It has further revealed that women made up only 10% of over 15,000 candidates in the 2023 elections cycle, representing 18 political parties. At federal level they made up 9% of all candidates for Presidential race, Senate and House of Representatives. And at state level, it constituted 11% of all candidates for Gubernatorial and States Assembly seats (Nkereuwem, 2023).

Similarly the trend is also common even within the circle of party positions, comparatively, with reference to 2023 general election an indication of gender gap was revealed in a report that compares parties in accordance with their nature and composition: small ; medium and large . Accordingly, as indicated in African Democratic Party (ADC) a small party 87% males and 13% females, Action Democratic Party (ADP) also another smaller party 92% male/08% females, then

Labour Party (LP) and All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) as medium parties with 94% men/06% females, and 88% male/12% female respectively. While, All Progressive Party (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) as larger parties, have 94% males/06 Females and 95% males/05 females respectively.( Nkereuwem, 2023,p5).

In a similar vein, (Nkereuwem, 2023) presents the percentage of women who ran for federal legislative positions across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, and the Federal Capital Abuja, during 2023 general elections:

S/No	Geopolitical Zones	Percentage of women participants
1	Northwest	3%
2	Northeast	7%
3	North Central	6%
4	Southwest	11%
5	South-South	12%
6	Southeast	13%
7	FCT Abuja	26%

**Source:** Nkereuwem, (2023)

Given the scenario above, the National Bureau of Statistics (in Agunbiade, 2020) in 2015 only 4.4% of Heads of Local government council were women, while female councillors formed 9.8%. Similarly, in federal executive council only seven out of 44 members were women constituting only 16.3%, while at National Assembly female representation was 5.45% and 4.60% at Senate and House of Representatives respectively. Thus, in view of this, Nkereuwem, (2023,p1) concluded that in general across all the national and subnational categories, women represented just over 10% of more than 15,000 candidates who ran in the 2023 Elections for president, National Assembly and Gubernatorial and State Assemblies. In a similar vein, the trend is the same even at local government level. In view of this, Olufuwunke {2014, p224) with reference to Ogun State , observed that the situation of women underrepresentation is no different, as only 4% of the councillors were women , while that of local government chairmen was below 4% from 1999-2011in the state. In fact, she maintains that in the case of four Akoko local government areas, not a single female hae ever emerged as either chairperson or councillor throughout the 149 wards in the local government areas between 1999 -2007 (Olufuwunke, 2014, p225).

To buttress the argument above the following table helps expose the situation in a more vivid manner.

Ranking	Country	Year of Election	No of Elected Women	No of Elected Men	Total No of all Elected Candidates	Proportion of Women Elected
119	Nigeria	2015	740	6, 828	7, 568	9.78%

Source: UN Women (in Berevoescu and Ballington, 2021, p24).

Violence against women in political life " is any act of, or threat of gender based violence, resulting in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women, that prevent them exercising and realizing their political rights, whether in public or private spaces, including the right to vote and hold public office, to vote in secret and to freely campaign, to associate and assemble, and to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression, such violence can be perpetrated by a family member, community member or by the state (Ballington, 2017). This violence against women prevent them from standing as candidates, winning competitive race for political office, discouraging women from voting, or punishing them for being active in the electoral process, limited visibility of women in politics and elections, the rise in political apathy and forced resignation from political races. Such acts can be psychological, physical and sexual in nature, and include the loss of livelihood, intimidation, assault and residential displacement, and murder."

Elections violence has a disproportionate impact on women both as candidate and a voter. With particular reference to women experience, according to Guidelines for Public Security Providers in Elections (2017,p18) elections violence represents any harm or threat of harm committed against women with the intent and/or impact of interfering with their free and equal participation in the electoral process during electoral period. It includes harassment, intimidations, physical harm, or coercion, threats, and financial pressures, and it may be committed in the home or other private spaces or in public spaces. These may be directed at women in any of their roles as electoral stakeholders (e.g voters, media, political actors, state actors, community leaders, or electoral officials.

Ette and Akpon-Obong (2022, p7-11) in their submission identified three major barriers that impede women political participation in Nigeria. Firstly, the nature of the political environment where powers mostly reside in the hands of political godfathers creates a lot of issues. They dictate who participate in politics and what conditions, but unfortunately, most of the time women political aspirants do not have and or stand to have one and this hamper their ability to contest. Secondly, is what they termed as 'politics of Insult' manifested in form of situation in which women political aspirants are exposed to castigation, character assassination, and blackmail and even verbal abuse, insults and all sorts of derogatory naming such as promiscuous, opportunist for richer men, and even prostitute, at party meetings, during rallies and campaign, or as hate speeches through media.

This also involves bullying and intimidation which are rooted in the fear most women have over their belief that 'no woman want to die and leave her children. Consequently, this pushes women political aspirants to quit or not even contest at all. Thirdly, is the major among the barriers, this is access to political funding which is the actual force behind the realization of women political participation and aspirations for political power and position. This trend is a global problem to women political power and position. In Nigeria, it is intricately related to the issue of 'godfatherism' in which path to political arena involves a race, where most of the time, the economic resources and privileges or influence of the godfather rather than political ideology or vision, pave way for his supporters to capture political powers, a very rare opportunity for women especially political aspirants.

Drawing on the evidences from a number of developing countries Ballington etal (2017, p4-5) observed that the type of election violence experienced by women and the frequency of incidents are very different from the violence perpetrated against men during elections, with women experiencing one third 1/3 of the number of direct physical attacks than men encounter but, beings three times more likely to be victims of psychological violence. These include a spectrum of experiences like fear of personal security, security of their loved ones, fear of social ostracism, and attacks on their moral character, more likely they may experience sexual harassment within their political parties, including being forced to perform sexual favours for office bearers. In addition, they are exposed to violence, which is visible in different ways: in escalation of harassment and aggression through media; in the intimidation, and sexual and physical violence against women in public life, in forcing political women to resign for Male candidates, and in the public scrutiny of women candidates where public commentary examines their appearance rather than their experiences and policies, and the extreme form women politicians are assassinated for exercising their political rights. In view of this violence against women in politics is one most serious obstacle to the realization of women political ambition in the world today (Ballington etal, 2017, p8).

According to Ballington (2007, p25-27) comprehensively categorized the forms of political violence against women in elections into three namely:

- i. Psychological form: these include verbal harassment, character assassination, threat of divorce or economic sanctions, social ostracism and marginalization, rumour campaigning and fear mongering, threats against family, negative media portrayal, online harassment and cyber-bullying, blackmail, threats of moral sanctions by employer or religious leaders, forced votes, ridiculing and shaming among others.
- ii. Physical forms: these involve intentional use of physical force with intentional use of physical force with potential for causing injuries, harm, death, pushing, shoving, throwing, grabbing, choking, shaking, slapping, punching, hitting, burning, the use of restraints or one's body size or strength against another person, and the use of or threat to use a weapon or object. It may also include kidnapping and arbitrary detention, beating, stoning, and physical abandonment or displacement, attacks of campaign team among others.
- iii. Sexual form: these include non-consensual sexual acts, attempt to obtain a sexual acts, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against person sexuality, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. These may also involve sexual



harassment, politically motivated assault and rape. These are used as weapon of violence against women in politics in general and in elections in particular, in order to degrade or weaken the female political opponent.

Supporting the argument above, Mambo and Kapingura (2019, p4-5) maintain that in many African states, politics is marred by violence, persecution, intimidation and torture. While, both genders are victims of this, it presents particular barriers to women engagement and political participation, which in turn affects negatively their socio-political rights and livelihood. In essence, violence against women is used as targeted and destructive tools in various ways throughout the electoral cycle to dissuade women from participating as elections administrators, voters and candidates.

In a similar vein, OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2023, p60) political violence is targeted against women because of their gender and thus, takes gender-based forms, such as sexist threats or sexual harassment and violence. And their aim is to discourage women from being politically active and exercising their human rights, and to influence, restrict or prevent the political participation of individual women and woman as group, inflict psychological, physical, and sexual harm or suffering and is directed against a woman in politics, because she is woman or affects women disproportionately. The 2016 Inter-parliamentary Union study indicates that 81.80% of women respondents (parliamentarians) reported cases of psychological violence, out of which 44.60% were of rape, beating, abduction and or death. Further, the study identifies social networks as major avenue of psychological violence in forms of sexist and misogynistic remarks, humiliating images, mobbing, intimidation and threats against women parliamentarians (OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2023, p61-62).

Furthermore, Antonia-Okoosi (Orji, 2018, p25) identifies five key factors relating to the practice of politics in Nigeria, which have constrained women's political representation. These include:

- i. Methods of candidate's selection of the party, which involves an expenses that require political candidates to conduct their own campaigns, involving excessive use of money beyond most women reach, thus many women aspirants are eliminated due to economic disparities between men and women in the country.
- ii. The influence of party leadership in manipulating and imposing or rather endorsing consensus candidate, through manipulative tactics such as changing the elections venue, nomination without elections, as well as zoning mentality of the party leadership, this constitutes an obstruction through which are eliminated.
- iii. Violence in forms of physical assaults, pressures, threats and intimidation.

#### **Implications of Election Security Challenges on Women Political Participation in Nigeria**

- i. Development of persistent political apathy among women in particular those aspiring for political power and position
- ii. Demoralisation of women from active participation as electoral staff both permanent and ad-hoc.
- iii. Few numbers of women holding political positions and who lack political power to influence decisions and public policy in favour of women in general

- iv. Psychological trauma among women politicians who are actively in politics but been experiencing one form of political violence, intimidation and harassment thereby rendering them powerless in term of decision-making as party members.
- v. Women face constant threats of losing their matrimonial home through possibility of divorce or even the possibility of being disown or moral sanctions by her family members including parents and relatives or her community in general.
- vi. Women are prevented from active standing as candidates and winning competitive race in elections.
- vii. Women face physical attack, injuries and displacement, kidnapping or even possible murder.
- viii. Women face cyber-bullying and negative propaganda, name calling and shaming and even libel.

### **Conclusion**

The significance of women political participation especially can not be overemphasized, however various elections security challenges namely political violence, sexual harassment and bullying, intimidations and negative propaganda, poor economic based, and god-fatherism, as well as social stigma, have been affecting that, thereby demoralising the women from active political contestation and even participation both as candidates and electorates, and this signifies negative development of persistent political apathy among Nigerian women. This trend indeed affects their democratic rights and freedom and the general political development in the country. Unfortunately, there have never been any significant efforts in controlling the challenges in the state. Hence, the trend continues and until positive measures are taken vigorously the matter will keep on worsening.

### **Recommendations**

- i. INEC and political parties should establish an independent body that would investigate the cases of violence and take all necessary actions to prosecute any culprit against of sexual harassment and intimidation against women both as elected officials, electoral staff, party member or political aspirants.
- ii. Government should adopt a zero tolerance against all forms of discrimination and barriers against humanity vulnerability in politics and political participation especially political selections and contestation.
- iii. There is need for enlightenment campaign to mobilize women in understanding their powers as electorates and the need to rally themselves in both financial and political supports for women candidates at all levels and political positions during elections.
- iv. Given cultural barriers against women contesting political positions, government should compensate them with more political appointments positions.
- v. A quota system should be constitutionally adopted at all levels of party structures and during elections that should dedicate a stipulated percentage for women political aspirants only.
- vi. Special intervention fund and concession or rather financial waiver should be granted to women political aspirants as to enable them cross the economic barriers of purchasing usually highly expensive primary elections forms.

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