


## Chapter 6

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# Women as the Invisible Hands that Swing the Pendulum of the Political Clock in Nigeria

Rosemary E. Akpan 

*Department of Conflict, Governance and Global Development  
University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom*   
rosemaryeffiong629@gmail.com

### Abstract

Women, who constitute 49.5% of the population of Nigeria, are noted for being crucial in a variety of tasks, including those of mother, time manager, community organiser, and socio-political activist. Despite the significant roles that women play and their numbers, society has not acknowledged the discrimination that women face, particularly when it comes to the political process of electing or selecting party flag-bearers and decision-making. This treatment has made women in Nigeria unable to maximise their potential for meaningful contributions to society. Consequently, this is one instance of marginalisation, where most of them are not easily allowed to participate fully in the political decision-making process. With the benefit of hindsight, women make up more than 50% of the electorate in every election. Yet, the political class seldom involves them in decision-making and the process of governance in Nigeria. The study sought to exchange knowledge and research-related insights that will help guide and enhance the creation of new studies in gender history and women's studies. The study employed an interdisciplinary approach. Data for this study was obtained from primary sources, such as focus group discussions, and corroborated with secondary sources. The study contended that women are the invisible hands that swing the pendulum of the political clock in Nigeria. The study concluded that the necessary motivation for tackling the women's issue in Nigeria is the institutionalisation and enforcement of affirmative actions on gender equity and women's empowerment in governance and decision-making.

**Keywords:** Decision-making, Democracy, Gender Equity, Governance, Marginalisation

## Introduction

Despite women making up 49.5 per cent of Nigeria's population, their political engagement has not received attention because of the enormous roles they play in our socio-economic and political activities. These roles go beyond simple home duties and cross over into leadership positions, in which women yearn for fair representation in the public arena and in decision-making processes that have an impact on them as members of a community.

Nigeria experienced 29 years of military rule before regaining full democracy in 1999. Every four years, general elections have become inseparable from the characteristics of Nigeria's democratic system. The fact that Nigeria uses a system in which adults from the age of 18 are eligible to vote and become elected regardless of gender, proves beyond a shadow of scepticism that the Constitution does not impose any limitations on any candidates based on gender. Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, the topic of women's unfair representation in politics has dominated political discourse. Samuel and Segun (2012) noted that only four women served as lawmakers in Nigeria during the first republic, and that this was insufficient representation. There was minimal improvement in women's engagement when it came to making decisions in politics during the second and third republics. They added that women never held more than 3.1% of seats in the national parliament and 5% of the Federal Executive Council's seats before 1999 (Samuel & Segun, 2012).

Because gender inequality is such a pervasive problem, it can be difficult for women to participate in democratic politics. Few women have ever held the highest levels of political positions worldwide in history. A major issue faced by women in the political domain across the world is gender inequality. In the Nigerian political scene, which appears patriarchal in nature and outlook, there are minimal opportunities for women to participate in politics (Ojo, 2018). Women have been discouraged from entering or engaging in politics because of an antagonistic imbalance and the political chauvinism of Nigerian society. Those who engage in politics are to a large extent involved at a peripheral level and are often hindered by some factors from participating at a higher political level. Traditional and socio-political patriarchal traditions to some extent devalue the role of women in politics and advocate for male dominance in Nigeria's democratic politics. Cultural underpinnings and traditions of the political environment in Nigeria mostly restrict women's ability to engage in democratic politics.

This chapter contends that women are the invisible hands that swing the pendulum of the political clock in Nigeria. Considering this reality, they are not properly integrated into the act of governance and decision-making.

It is argued that the necessary motivation for tackling the women's issue in Nigeria is the institutionalisation and implementation of affirmative actions for women's empowerment and gender equity in acts of governance and decision-making.

The objectives of this research are:

1. to identify the significant and valuable roles that women play in contributing to political involvement and to examine the extent to which the roles are merely recognised.
2. to find out the obstacles preventing women from participating in Nigeria's decision-making; and
3. to proffer recommendations on how gender disparity in Nigerian politics could be stopped.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Liberal Feminist Theory**

According to Giddens (2006), the Liberal Feminist Theory asserts that women's limited access to civil rights and certain social resources like education and work is the root cause of gender inequality. To discover solutions and ensure that people's rights are safeguarded, liberal feminists frequently turn to modifying the law. According to Samkange (2015:1175), liberal feminism entails "gradual improvements through advocating for equal rights for all, as well as legislation and policies that promote equality." This demonstrates that women have the same right as men to take part in politics, run for office without worrying about negative consequences, and make politically significant decisions for society. This is because equal rights for men and women are appropriate. Therefore, women should not be prevented from actively participating in societal activities because of their education or culture.

Because of widespread support for cultural behaviours that encourage subordination, traditional beliefs about women's inferiority to men still hold sway in some parts of Nigeria. Men still predominate in terms of social, political, economic, and religious issues. Rarely are women's political efforts, successes, and societal accomplishments recognised. To obtain the status, obligations, and rights to which they are legally entitled, considering these conditions, women must actively engage in political decision-making (Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2015). In Nigeria, women still face fewer favourable circumstances than men in terms of labour force participation, political participation, income, and the percentage of seats in the legislature (Tama &

Maiwuya, 2022). Liberal feminism needs to be given more attention if women in Nigeria are to realise their right to equity.

To account for the low performance of gender gerrymandering, this theory expresses that education has a significant impact on women's health, economic opportunities, and political participation. However, women still face significant barriers to accessing education, particularly in developing countries. Women's access to education is a critical factor in their empowerment. Education enables women to acquire knowledge and skills, improve their economic and social status, and promote gender equality. Despite significant progress in recent years, there are still significant disparities in access to education between men and women, particularly in Nigeria.

In some parts of Nigerian society, we find fewer women dominating in all areas of life because of the erroneous notion that women are inherently less intelligent and are physically incapable than men (Raji, 2023). As a result, women frequently face discrimination in society. The supposition that women are subordinated stems from a system of social and legal prohibitions that keep them out of the so-called public sphere and hinder their success. Since 1999, political parties in the country have not frequently nominated women for party offices and elected positions like those up for election to the National Assembly. However, they benefited from every step taken to increase the representation of men in Parliament (Raji, 2023).

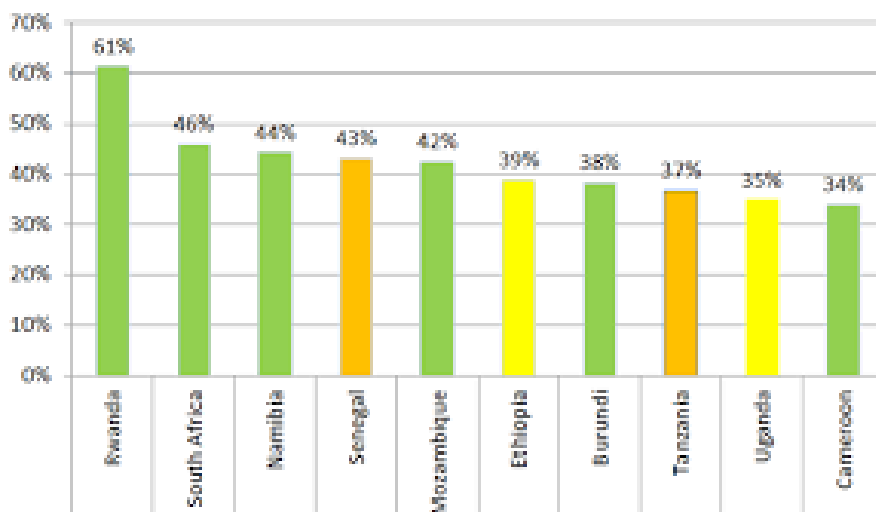
The timing of political events, which typically take place after work hours when women are taking care of domestic duties at home, and the country's political violence, which disproportionately impacts women because of their sensitivity, are instances. There is an assumption that women's needs and interests are not adequately reflected or represented in the democratic self-determination processes. This leads to discrimination against women holding elective or appointed positions in Nigeria, where laws and policies affecting them are made. Legislation that might help Nigerian women does not pass because of the low representation of women in the National Assembly. The assumption that there should be more women in the National Assembly lends credence to this pattern.

### **Analysis of women's political involvement in the electoral process between 1999 and 2023**

Since men and women both exist in society, it stands to reason that both should take an almost equal part in politics. The democratic goal, which emphasises the equal representation of all interest groups in politics, lends weight to this supposition. Okeke (2015) and Dahl (1971) identified a crucial

characteristic of democracy as the government's ongoing response to the needs of its constituents, who are treated as political equals. The low percentage of women in politics in Nigeria, a supposed democratic system, is seen as a violation of this idea. Oluyemi (2016) asserts that the restoration of democracy on 29 May 1999, gave rise to optimism for a fresh start in the struggle for greater gender equity in Nigerian politics. Statistics and statistical data collected from 1999 to the present clearly demonstrate that women's involvement in Nigerian politics and decision-making is minimal, despite the democratic transition having created opportunities that permit fair participation. Nigeria has had seven different administrations since it returned to democracy in 1999.

In comparison to the majority of other African countries, including Uganda (35%), South Africa (46%), Ethiopia (39%), Cameroon (34%), Rwanda (61%), Namibia (44%), Senegal (43%), Mozambique (42%), and Tanzania (37%). Nigerian women's representation in the national legislature is roughly the lowest, at 8.9% (International Idea, 2021).



**Figure 1:** Women's Political Participation: Africa Barometer 2021

Source: International Idea (2021)

Omolara (2015) states that women in Nigeria have attempted to run for elective posts at various levels to reach positions of political decision-making since the return to democratic rule in 1999, but their efforts have not been very effective based on the results of elections held since 1999. Accordingly, she looks at the participation of women in general elections, where women continue to be disproportionately sidelined since there are fewer women

than men in positions of leadership and decision-making. For instance, no woman has ever been elected vice president or president in the political history of Nigeria. The tenure of President Obasanjo, from 1999 to 2007, could be compared to the interval between the return to democracy and the protracted period of military government. In 2007, President Umaru Musa Yar'adua succeeded him as president, and after Yar'adua's death in 2010, President Goodluck Jonathan took over. Jonathan held on to his position until 2015. President Muhammadu Buhari remained in office following the 2019 elections. He initially took office in 2015. The recent general elections of 2023, which brought President Bola Tinubu into power, are likely going to yield the same result.

In Nigeria, the position of vice president adopts the same style as that of the president, in which women are exclusive. The position has been held by five individuals, none of whom are women, since democracy was reinstated in 1999. A woman has never been elected governor in Nigeria's history. Mrs Virginia Etiaba, who became the governor of Anambra State in 2006 after Peter Obi was ousted, is the nation's first and only female governor by chance. She was only in charge for three months. Additionally, men have dominated the National Assembly. For instance, out of the 109 senators in the Senate in 1999, just three were female. By 2007, that number had risen to four, and by 2011, it had reached nine, seven, and seven by 2015 (Ohaja et al., 2022). Out of the 360 members of the House of Representatives in 1999, 12 were women. According to Ohaja et al. (2022), there were 23 additions in 2003, followed by 26 in 2007, 26 in 2011, and 11 in 2019. Furthermore, the 2023 Adamawa State gubernatorial election, which was hoped to turn out in favour of a female (Mrs Aisha Dahiru), was later declared null and void by the INEC.

Women are under-represented in elected posts at all levels of government, from the federal to the local. The number of women who were elected to public office from 1999 to 2023 is shown in Table 15.

In West Africa, the sub-regional average for female representation in elected and appointed positions is 15%, whereas the national average is approximately 6%. Nigeria was placed 149<sup>th</sup> out of 155 nations in the 2021 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report (WEF, 2021) for political empowerment because of the 10.3% representation of women in ministerial positions (three out of 29) and 5.8% amongst parliamentarians. Out of 35 sub-Saharan African nations, Nigeria comes in 32<sup>nd</sup> place, only ahead of Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Chad (WEF, 2022)

**Table 15:** Number of women in elected positions from 1999–2023

Office	Seat Available	1999	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019	2023
President	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vice-President	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The Senate	109	3	4	9	7	7	7	8
House of Reps	360	12	23	27	26	20	11	13
Governor	36	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dep. Governor	36	1	2	6	3	6	4	6
State HA	990	12	38	54	62	-	40	48

Source: Adapted from Oyoru (2023)

**Table 16:** Global gender gap – Nigerian political empowerment index

	Global Ranking	Global Average Score	Nigerian Score*	Female	Male	F/M
Political empowerment index	149	0.218	0.047			
Women in parliament, %	147	0.312		5.8	94.2	0.06
Women in ministerial positions, %	123	0.235	0.115	10.3	89.7	0.11
Years with female/male head of state (last 50)	76	0.144	0.0	0.0	50	0.0

\* on a scale of 0–1, where 1 = gender parity

Source: WEF (2021).

Nigeria is ranked 139<sup>th</sup> out of 156 nations in the overall global gender gap index for 2021 (with a gender gap of 63%) based on the average scores of the following indicators: political empowerment (0.047), economic engagement and opportunity (0.687), health and survival (0.967), and educational attainment (0.806).

According to Afolabi and Arogundade (2013), access, involvement, representation, and transformation are four approaches to examining the difficulties of women's political representation and participation in politics and administration. First, access to and involvement in political institutions, including authority within such institutions and quantitative and qualitative representation, will ultimately result in a social and political transformation of the polity. To increase the political empowerment of women, these four

conditions must be met. Politics is an important context for decision-making. It is up to people holding official positions in the government to decide how to distribute scarce resources, such as tax money. Politicians often make decisions that favour certain people to the detriment of others. Second, political influence is a useful resource, and politics is one social institution that is impacted by the family. Third, having power is required to participate in politics (Paxton, 2020).

Women in leadership and executive roles can enhance the lives of other women by influencing the decisions that affect them. Political engagement is the level and nature of public participation in political institutions and organisations connected to them, such as those that deal with the economy and culture (Adu, 2008). It entails casting a ballot, participating in political debates and campaigns, attending party caucuses, or planning meetings, vying for office, and holding elective office (Adu, 2008). All organisations, including those of women, have influence over the distribution of power as one of their primary motivations for participating in politics. It is interesting to note that even though women are regarded as voters in a democratic system, they nevertheless struggle to be accepted into power structures and hold positions of decision-making authority because they are viewed as not being qualified.

This explains why women's access to leadership positions does not necessarily result in improved coordination of women's interests all around. It also clarifies how women's true needs are disregarded in favour of those who are determined by their race, financial status, or upbringing (Adu, 2008). The goals of 'feminising the political agenda,' or the voicing of women's concerns and ideas in public discourse, as well as the desire for public policies to take into consideration how they affect women, can be promoted by female legislators (Adedeji, 2010). Most gender issues in a male-dominated legislature are either neglected or are treated largely from a male perspective. Most of the time, female lawmakers must convince their male counterparts that a certain gender-related policy should be approved.

One of the main factors limiting and impeding women's participation in politics today is the issue of finances. According to Stacey (1993), some people who are against women running for office think it is wrong for women to work extra hard to lobby others. Most certainly, she might as well abandon her plans to run for office right away (Stacey, 1993). According to Stacey (1993), "The Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development" addressed the issue of women's empowerment and bemoaned women's marginalisation in Nigeria's political system, blaming it on the unfavourable political climate in the country. She also ascribed the issue to the violence and male chauvinism that have taken over Nigerian political contexts, as

well as a lack of finance, as some of the factors prohibiting Nigerian women from competing in elections, because of which there are not many women in public office.

Furthermore, unlike other countries where things are not frequently performed poorly, Nigeria is a complex state. If caution is not used right away, 35% of positive activity could turn out to be a phantom. The truth is that no level of administration demonstrated any sincerity in working towards the 35% affirmation of women's involvement in active government. Esidene & Abdul (2013) assert that there was little representation of women in the zoning plan in Goodluck Jonathan's administration. Twelve men and seven women were elected to the House of Representatives, seven to the Senate, and one woman was a deputy governor during the general elections conducted in 2011 (Esidene & Abdul, 2013).

In addition, figures show that in the 2011 elections, 218 women ran for the House of Representatives seats and 88 women ran for Senate seats. Only five women across the country ran for governor in the elections, while some male candidates also had female running mates (Afolabi & Arogundade, 2013). Comparatively, these figures also demonstrate a decline in women's success following the restoration of democracy in Nigeria in 1999. Out of 631 women who were vying for more than 1,900 open positions in the 1999 elections, only 181 individuals were selected to hold office. The year 2011 saw a decrease in the number and proportion of women elected to office when compared to 2007 and 2003. Despite winning 660 party primaries, only 93 women nationwide were elected to office in the 2007 elections (Afolabi & Arogundade, 2013).

The Jonathan administration had pledged during electioneering to have 35% women's representation in his administration. His commitment to this pledge was reaffirmed on 3 May during the Mentorship Summit for African Women, which was hosted in Abuja by the Centre for African Women Leaders Think-Thank. However, Odebode (2011) argued that his government's pledge of 35% affirmative women's participation was not fully met. In a similar vein, party statistics showed that out of over 40 positions, the only one reserved for women was the women's leader, despite suggestions that women should be given 20% representation in the formation of political parties, not in elective positions or in any specific positions. For instance, it was proposed that the PDP allocate 20% of executive seats to women, but it was turned down (Abubakar & Ahmad, 2014).

In the most recent general elections, which were conducted in 2023, women received 17 out of the 423 seats on the Senate and Representative List. While this represents 3.5%, the men received 408 seats, which represent

96.5% of the 423 seats (Raji, 2023). Three females won in the Senate and 14 in the House of Representatives, making a total of 17 women in the 10<sup>th</sup> National Assembly (Sule, 2023). Even after about 25 females contested to be Governors of their respective states, none eventually emerged as Governor (*ThisDayLive*, 2023). Out of 24 female deputy governorship candidates in 15 states, six of the Governors who chose these female Deputy Governors as running mates were elected (Zagi et al., 2023). As a result, this calls for great concern because of the noticeable disparity in male and female percentages in governance. For things to return to normal and for gender parity to be attained in the country, women need to hold 35% of the positions in the political sphere.

### **Factors hampering women's participation in the political process and decision-making in Nigeria.**

Women's engagement in the political sphere is constrained by several obstacles. These obstacles include, amongst others, cultural, economic, and legal ones. This study will concentrate on a few variations of these barriers. However, these factors may not be unique to only Nigeria. The reason is that African countries such as Kuwait, Qatar and Maldives with similar characteristics of poor women's political representation have enacted legislations that have reported some measure of success.

#### **Party flag-bearing**

With the current political system or orientation in Nigeria, political and sometimes economic decision-making is determined or in the hands of government officials who were campaigned for and rallied for by citizens, of whom the majority were women.

Women are rarely selected, nominated, or elected as the party's flag-bearers. Consequent upon this, women most often only remain as mere voters. Where the fault line is to ensure that they should be elected or selected to present their parties, in the case where this cannot be fully achieved, at least they should meet up to 30% of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 (UN, 1995). This will help break male dominance in politics and advocate gender equity.

#### **Social and cultural influences of religion**

Religion actively supports the social, political, and economic limitations that these groups must face, and it also strives to advance gender stereotypes that are harmful to women. Religion makes sure that most women are prohibited from participating in economic and political processes, such as voting and running for office (Luka, 2016). Islamic edicts are commonly

used as justification for behaviour like the state's policy of confining women in 'purdah,' giving girls away in early marriages, forbidding them from receiving an education, and restricting their capacity to participate effectively in politics in general, especially when political parties are choosing their choice of candidates. For example, the majority of Muslim-dominated states in the North practice 'purdah,' which entails keeping women out of public view. When women are under purdah, they are not allowed to leave their houses without their husbands' consent and must always have a male companion with them. The need for Muslim women to cover their faces in public further limits the versatility of clothing for those who observe purdah. There is a cultural assumption that women are detestable when they mislead males and that they are incapable of leading themselves. Religious and cultural ideas that oppose gender equity and equal employment opportunities for men and women prevent many women from being found in high-hierarchy positions (Abdu, 2018).

### **Threats and violence**

In Nigeria, political violence is another factor that reduces women's political decision-making. Most often, politics in Nigeria is typically out of the question for women, because of election-related gang activity before, during, and after the elections (Afolabi & Arogundade, 2013) and the accompanying insecurity, which results in the loss of lives and property. For instance, Dorathy Nyone, a female candidate, recounted her personal experience by saying, "A ward chairman was shot dead; all the women and most of the males fled the scene. I was picked up and driven home by my partner. Only men who were well-prepared for the bloodbath were left behind to decide the winners manually; therefore, I was scared" (Luka, 2016). Consequently, because of the recent wave of political murders, continued political intimidation, and other violent acts, many women now fear politics, even though this story traditionally depicts electoral violence in Nigeria.

### **Discriminatory laws and practices**

Many contemporary nations have discriminatory laws and customs because they devalue women and treat them as the property of men. Because of gender stereotypes in culture, conventions, and behaviours, women usually feel inferior to men and are at a disadvantage in socio-political environments, even in urban areas. Women overemphasise their 'femininity' because they accept their status as 'the weaker sex,' overemphasise the sensitive part of their sex, and associate good performance with men as a result of these socially built norms and stereotype roles. For instance, most traditions give the boy more importance than the girl by sending the male child to school

and leaving the girl to look after the siblings or find a husband. There are a few more illiterate women than there used to be, which makes it harder for women to compete with men in politics (Agbalajobi, 2010).

### **Women's perspective on politics**

There is a consensus that high political virility is the basis of Nigerian politics. Political virility refers to a person's ability to compete in an unstable environment, take something by force when necessary, and match violence with violence. Men are usually perceived as more resilient, powerful, autonomous, and willing to fight in political endeavours, but women are viewed as being too passive to participate in politics and administration. The societal norms and ideologies that through socialisation, created different gender roles according to biological distinctions also have an impact on this consensus. Women are further removed from traditional politics because of their view of it as a nasty game and their fear of violence. According to Nkoyo (2017), there does not appear to be a critical awareness in Nigeria of the distinction between a visible agenda for women and an agenda that affects women. Even though the significance of women's numbers has been emphasised over time, it has been challenging for women to achieve leadership roles since, in contrast to men, they are perceived as 'supporter clubs, squads of cheerleaders, and clappers.' The majority of female politicians think that in order to be successful, they must act like men; they run for office thinking that they are special. Additionally, women's modesty is of little assistance to them in the political debate and murky political environment (Agbalajobi, 2010).

### **Women's lack of interest**

Most women are not particularly interested in becoming involved in politics. Sometimes, women's disinterest in politics can be attributed to a variety of social factors, including their socialisation, the notion that politics and leadership are not for them, their disinterest in competing with men in politics in any party, social stigma, socio-cultural issues, and religious beliefs, amongst others. According to Abdu (2018), if there was justice in the world, most women would prioritise their efforts by marrying, having children, and focusing completely on domestic tasks rather than participating in politics.

## **Methodology**

An interdisciplinary approach was used in the study. Focus group interviews were used to collect primary data for this study, which was then verified by

secondary sources. In four out of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria – the North Central, South East, South West, and South-South – we conducted group interviews with a variety of female politicians and male allies in various cities. Travel to the North East and North West zones was prohibited because of security concerns. Participants were chosen using the snowballing process, depending on their prominence in the media, standing within their political parties (such as contenders for elective office), and other factors. The women and some of their allies were political party members of the PDP and the APC, as well as other smaller political groups. Semi-structured interviews were used to examine the experiences of female politicians at various political levels. This strategy was most effective since it allowed the researcher to elicit answers and encourage participants to go into further detail. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews, as noted by Lune and Berg (2016:27), enables researchers to explore topics and ideas proposed by the participants. The study also interviewed women who for a very long had been time engaged in politics as voters and mobilisers in their various communities.

According to Lune and Berg (2016:33), this can yield “a much more textured set of accounts from participants than would have resulted had only scheduled questions been asked.” Most of the discussion in this chapter is based on the comments of 25 women and 10 male allies who were questioned. All the women, except for two, have run for office at different levels of government. The two ladies were ardent party members and campaigners despite never having run for public office. The subjects chose the locations for interviews, which included businesses, homes, and meeting rooms at hotels. Between 45 and 60 minutes were allotted for each interview. Each interview was recorded on tape, transcriptions were made, and codes were applied for analysis. All the respondents, apart from one, gave their approval for their names to be used, but we did so with caution in the text.

For the study, a thematic approach was also used, using quotes from interviews to highlight similarities and discrepancies in the individuals' stories. We gave the politicians room to develop their stories in a way that put them at the centre of the investigation. We have included verbatim quotes from a few of the research participants, in keeping with one of the objectives of this study (namely, to give voice to the politically disenfranchised).

The same set of structured questions was asked of each participant regarding the difficulties faced by female politicians because of their gender. Although the specifics and individual situations varied, all the female respondents agreed that there were four significant obstacles to their political careers. These include ‘politics of insult,’ budgetary constraints, the patriarchal nature of party structures, and bullying and intimidation. According to the research participants, the political party system is a

significant barrier to women's participation in decision-making. Women are frequently at a disadvantage when election candidates are recruited by a small group of gatekeepers who make arbitrary and undemocratic decisions, especially because the selection methods are opaque.

## **Findings**

The chapter brings out two main arguments. The first is the visibility of women in the political process, and the second is the invisibility of women in decision-making.

### **The Political process**

Women are very useful in elections when it comes to rallies, voting, sensitisation, campaigns, and so on. Sadly, despite the important role that women play in the political process, as soon as the election is over, they are no longer needed in the act of governance. For democracy to be viable, two key ideas – political emancipation and political participation must be understood and practiced. Both elements are interconnected because the greater the level of political participation amongst women, as measured by their freedom and the removal of barriers to exercising their political rights, the more positive the impact this will have on the survival and growth of democracies.

### **Decision-making**

Women are not even given up to 30% of the space as proposed by the 1995 Beijing Declaration (UN, 1995) in the political process and decision-making. Aside from being very powerful at the formative level of the political process, politicians only use women in the campaign, sensitisation, rallies, and voting on election day. Despite these horrific disadvantages, women still contribute a larger percentage to voter registration and political awareness. Regrettably, when it comes to selecting or electing political or party flag-bearers, women are nowhere to be found or are not involved. They are almost completely cut off after voting. Only a few governors have tried to choose women as their deputy; hence, this is not up to the 30% of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN, 1995).

Women experience difficulties just because they are women, based on the knowledge that politics in Nigeria is masculinised in an environment where masculinity is valued. But in addition to gender, Nigeria's low representation of women in politics is also a result of the interaction between several economic and socio-cultural variables, as well as the patriarchal nature of the nation's political structure. Most cultural and societal norms in Nigeria legalise male domination and female subjugation, promoting

women's subordination as a positive trait. The two main religions of the nation, Islam and Christianity, both place a strong emphasis on submission. This is especially so in the Islamic religion. Women are thus trained into passive political positions, which discourages them from participating in politics. As a result, Nigeria's predominantly male political culture and election system are strengthened by the relative lack of women in positions of power.

Nigeria continues to have the lowest rate of female engagement in government on the entire globe, at just 7% (Onyegbula, 2013). Over time, women's involvement in politics and decision-making in Nigeria has not usually been favourable. The political scene in the country is dynamic in the sense that every day, more people announce their intention to run for office in the general election. Women mobilise themselves for rallies, electoral campaigns, and political meetings more than a percentage of men can. However, despite women being used as a mobilisation tool or mechanism during election periods, they are neglected in the aspect of decision-making.

Similar to this, Danjuma (2015) asserted that women's under-representation in political and decision-making structures is because of a failure to acknowledge that the democratic process should be inclusive thanks to the gender component of democracy. Women have been actively engaged in the political process for a very long time by attending political meetings and rallies as well as voting in every election. However, in the aspect of decision-making, it appears as if it is becoming the norm for Nigerian women to be politically marginalised. This treatment has made women in Nigeria unable to maximise their potential for meaningful contributions to society. We must acknowledge and comprehend the fact that women play a crucial role in the fabric of our society and the governance structure for the socio-economic and political advancements of the Nigerian nation.

The percentage of women in political and decision-making positions in Nigeria is still far lower than the 35% global standard for affirmative action (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013). This largely explained why women are under-represented in public life and have their concerns ignored by the government most of the time. The lack of female participation in party politics severely harms Nigeria's electoral and political systems because their near-exclusion has limited their ability to make contributions, become involved, and have an impact on party politics and the Nigerian political system. Nigerian women encounter marginalisation in party politics and the political process.

Instead of a lack of interest or drive, societal marginalisation typically explains why women have historically had low political representation. Women dominate roughly 55% of the electorate but they are bereft of the

same privileges as men, who dominate politics and hold the vast majority of the country's decision-making positions (Ogbogu, 2012).

Since Nigerian democracy was restored in 1999, men have held a lopsided majority in the National Assembly. There is an assumed patriarchal framework in our political and economic lives, and according to Ojo (2020), it restricts the participation of women in politics in favour of their male counterparts, leading to an imbalance in political participation and representation. Ojo (2020) continued by stating that Nigeria still has a relatively low percentage of female representation in the country's parliament, which is extremely concerning despite the need for gender balance in legislatures around the world.

Nigeria has ratified a number of international accords that forbid gender discrimination and promote equal access for men and women in institutions of power. One of them is the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (UN, 1948), which states that everyone has the right to vote, and that men and women should have equal rights. Others include the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UN, 1966a), the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (UN, 1966b), and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (UN, 1979), which the Nigerian government ratified in 1985 without any reservations. Nevertheless, the gender gap in the National Assembly and other political circles is still quite wide. Despite the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended in Section 12) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999) stating that an international treaty must be domesticated before it could be applicable to a particular domain, the majority of these instruments have not been heeded (Ojo, 2020).

To make matters worse, both Chambers of the National Assembly rejected a measure submitted by Senator Biodun Olujimi in 2016 that sought to domesticate and incorporate these instruments on the second reading (Eniola, 2018, as cited in Okechukwu, 2022). A person must also be chosen by a political party in that party's primary election, according to the Nigerian Constitution of 1999, in order to serve in the National Assembly. According to Nda (2003), political parties are important institutions that support candidates in elections in representative democracies. Researchers often overlook the role of party politics in maintaining gender disparity in Nigerian politics because they frequently focus on the patriarchal, cultural, religious, economic, and educational aspects of low women's representation in Nigeria's representative democracy. (Nda, 2003).

## Conclusion and recommendations

Women's political participation in Nigeria is a significant issue. Despite the enormous effort made by the government and non-governmental organisations in the wake of the Declaration made at the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women (UN, 1995), which favoured placing 30% of women in decision-making positions, women have been consigned to the background despite the existence of the 35% affirmative action of the National Gender Policy (NGP) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023) for a more inclusive representation of women in elective and appointed positions. It is important to mention that because of the nation's natural leadership style; Nigerian women have continued to face marginalisation. Despite the difficulties that women face, there is a lot of positive momentum behind women's activity and advocacy, the education of women, and the willingness of succeeding governments to support women's empowerment.

It was also interesting to find that without women, the Nigerian form of politics, which involves a series of different stages before the election voting day, cannot thrive. This is because women are very useful in elections when it comes to rallies, voting, sensitisation, campaigns, and so on. All these activities precede election voting day, yet society does not recognise the fundamental preliminary roles that they play in making elections successful. This means that they will not participate in the decision-making process because their powers only end at elections or the voting booth. The question arises: does this mean that women can only vote but cannot be voted for? Does this mean that their roles should merely end with voting? Where the real deal is (decision-making), they are invisible and cannot be found because they only feature in bringing the real policymakers to power while being the real hands that swing the pendulum of the political clock in Nigeria.

Even though women often perform at the highest levels in both the public and private spheres, a vicious cycle of impediments frequently prevents them from taking the reins of leadership. Both internal and external barriers, such as patriarchy, societal preconceptions, the difficulty of balancing parental and professional obligations, and a lack of networking, have severely hindered this group's effectiveness as leaders.

The following recommendations are offered in light of the study's findings:

Reduce to the barest minimum damaging socio-cultural norms, sexism, religion, and gender bias against women serving in government requires more than just a mental shift. Women should be encouraged and supported to pursue leadership roles in both the public and commercial sectors.

To address these challenges of access to education, policies and programmes must be designed to be inclusive and to address the specific needs of women. This may include providing scholarships for girls, creating safe transportation options, and working with communities to challenge cultural norms that limit women's access to education. For instance, parents, particularly those in rural regions, should be urged to enrol their female children in school to decrease illiteracy and prepare girls for future leadership responsibilities.

The government should create a network of female leaders so that they can share their leadership experiences, triumphs, and struggles to motivate other women who aspire to be leaders. The government should also examine the current policy on women's empowerment to reflect reality. Female executives should be encouraged to overcome self-doubt by making difficult decisions, speak up, or step outside of their comfort zone.

Women should come together and support a common cause to succeed. To fulfil their 'dream of gender equity,' they must support and help one another.

To boost women's representation and engagement, it is crucial to advocate for quotas rather than waiting for social change. When the next election approaches and each political party should plan its strategies for victory, the practice of internal democracy should be the first step towards making gender parity a reality. Women will immediately have an easier time getting into any political positions they want as party flag-bearers at all levels, if gender parity is achieved at the party level. It ought to be included in the platforms of the main political parties.

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## Chapter 6

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