



ELECTORAL IRREGULARITIES AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN SOUTHWEST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines electoral irregularities on women's political participation in Southwest, Nigeria. The research employs a quantitative approach to analyse the impact of electoral irregularities on women's political participation in Southwest, Nigeria. Key stakeholders and in-depth interviews were conducted to gather data from respondents who were purposely selected from the states that make up the region and among politically active women, as well as interested members of the public. The paper explains that women's participation in politics is crucial for women and democratic development, but in some of the states in Southwest, Nigeria, women are under represented in decision-making positions, most especially in the elective positions. The paper reveals that electoral irregularities, including violence, intimidation, and vote-buying, significantly hinder women's ability to participate in politics. Cultural norms and discriminatory practices were also identified as major barriers to women's political participation. The paper recommends electoral reforms that would address all the electoral irregularities that dissuade women participation in politics, gender-sensitive policies, and empowerment programmes to promote women's political empowerment and democratic development.

Keywords: Democratic development, Electoral irregularities, Gender equality, Political thuggery, Women empowerment, Women's political participation

Introduction

The impact of electoral irregularities on women's political participation in Southwest, Nigeria, is a pressing concern that undermines the integrity of the electoral process and perpetuates gender inequality in the region. Electoral irregularities, such as violence, bribery, and manipulation of election results, create an environment that discourages women from participating in politics (Oloyede, 2021). Electoral irregularities in Nigeria dates back to the period before the nation got her independence in 1960, and has continued to be a significant issue in the country's democratic history. Even during the colonial period, elections were marred by rigging and malpractices, with the British colonial masters documented to have taken measures to rig the elections they presided over (Yusuf & Othman, 2016). This trend has continued to becloud the political space in Nigeria till date. In Southwest Nigeria, women's participation in politics seems to be limited, with fewer women holding elective and appointive positions in most of the states except in Lagos State where a good number of women occupy both elective and appointive positions (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013, Iruke, 2024). Ekiti State Women Stakeholders Forum has advocated for a minimum of 35% representation of women at all levels of government, citing the National Gender Policy and international frameworks such as the Beijing Platform for Action (NDI, 2022). The national

average of women's political participation in the country has remained 6.7 percent in majorly elective and appointive positions. This is still very far below what the World Conference on Women in Beijing recommended which advocated for 30 percent affirmative action. In other countries of the world, elective offices and gender parity have not enjoyed a strong relationship (Inter-parliamentary Union 2023; Adebayo & Olutayo, 2024). While some government and non-governmental organisations have been proactive in their commitment to improving women's representation in both elective and appointive positions through different measures of the Beijing affirmative declaration, discrimination along gender line continues to exist. Electoral irregularities exacerbate the existing gender disparities in politics, making it even more challenging for women to participate and be represented in both elective and appointive positions (Nwankwor & Adebayo, 2021; Independent Electoral Commission 2023; Adebayo & Olutayo, 2024). The work of Abdu-Raheem & Bangbade cited in Mene (2024) affirmed the instances of electoral irregularities in Nigeria as it has significantly influenced Nigeria's Fourth Republic governance, leading to insecurity, corruption, weak democratic institutions, lack of internal democracy within political parties and other threats to democratic practices which manifested in areas like harassment of candidates' agents and voters to results inflation, ballot box



snatching, political assassinations, unauthorized results announcements, vote-buying, and election rigging. Addressing these irregularities is crucial to promoting women's political participation and empowerment in Southwest, Nigeria.

Women's participation in politics extends far beyond casting their ballots. They can also make their voices heard by becoming advocates, activists, and members of political parties, as well as running for offices as candidates knowing fully well that one cannot ignore that political parties are the gatekeeper of any democratic government and Nigeria independent electoral body is responsible for the conduct of election both at the State and National levels (Oyinloye, 2020). Although experiences and observations have clearly shown that men participate and are more interested in politics than women when it comes to contesting for elective positions and women do grapple with political marginalization as their voices are hardly heard because of the fear of the unknown.

Political parties play crucial roles in shaping women's prospects for public office. The parties control key decisions, such as nominations, candidate positioning on party lists, and campaign support among others. This influence extends to the national political agenda, determining which women's issues gain traction and is addressed by lawmakers. However, despite the fact that Nigeria is a signatory to Berlin Affirmative Action Policy, which is meant to counter the effect of discrimination and under-representation of women in elective and appointive positions, many political parties in the country still believe that they are doing the womenfolk a favour by allowing them to vie for political positions or by appointing them into political offices. This supposed not to be so in the spirit of gender equality which must be emphasized in the political space of Nigeria in general and Southwest in particular.

To achieve Berlin Affirmative Action Policy in the country, electoral management bodies must prioritize gender equality and implement policies that promote women's participation and gender equality. This can be done by providing training and capacity-building programmes for women, ensuring data disaggregation to track women's participation, and promoting women's leadership. Additionally, addressing electoral irregularities, such as violence and discrimination, is essential to creating a level playing ground for women's participation. Ultimately, women's equal participation in the electoral process is essential for achieving sustainable development and genuine democracy in the region which is well known for her enlightenment. As the United Nations Women's organization emphasizes, women's leadership and participation

are critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to shed light on the multifaceted dimensions of electoral irregularities and their far-reaching effects on women political participation. The impact of electoral irregularities on women political participation coupled with various forms of irregularities in the political landscape and corruption have heightened the complexity of the electoral landscape in the country (Mene, 2024). These factors collectively contribute to an environment where electoral irregularities not only threatens the democratic ideals but also electoral integrity with the tendency of not allowing women to participate in the political process and this does not augur well for the political development of the country. The table below shows the distribution of women's political participation in all levels of governance in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023.

Table 1: Distribution of women's representation at all levels of governance from 1999 to 2023.

| | 1999 | | 2003 | | 2007 | | 2011 | | 2015 | | 2019 | | 2023 | |
|-------------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|
| Office | No of Seats | Women | No of Seats | Women | No of Seats | Women | No of Seats | Women | No of Seats | Women | No of Seats | Women | No of Seats | Women |
| President | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Senate | 109 | 3 | 109 | 4 | 109 | 9 | 109 | 7 | 109 | 8 | 109 | 8 | 109 | 4 |
| HoR | 360 | 12 | 360 | 21 | 360 | 25 | 360 | 26 | 360 | 22 | 360 | 13 | 360 | 17 |
| Governor | 36 | 0 | 36 | 0 | 36 | 0 | 36 | 0 | 36 | 0 | 36 | 0 | 36 | 0 |
| DG | 36 | 1 | 36 | 2 | 36 | 6 | 36 | 3 | 36 | 4 | 36 | 3 | 36 | 8 |
| SHoA | 990 | 24 | 990 | 40 | 990 | 57 | 990 | 69 | 990 | 50 | 990 | 40 | 990 | 48 |
| LGA | 710 | 13 | 774 | 15 | 740 | 27 | 740 | 0 | 774 | 0 | 774 | N/A | 774 | 23 |
| Councillors | 6368 | 69 | 6368 | 267 | 6368 | 235 | 6368 | 0 | 6368 | 0 | 6368 | N/A | 6368 | N/A |
| Ministers | 47 | 7 | 47 | 7 | 27 | 7 | 42 | 12 | 30 | 6 | 43 | 7 | 43 | 7 |

Sources: Nigeria Centenary Country Report on Women, December, 2013 and INEC database (2024).

Table 2: Nigerian Women in key elected positions since 1999.

| Year | Senate | Total Seats | HOR | Total Seats | Gov. | Total Seats | Deputy Governor | Total Seats | President | Total Seats | Vice President | Total Seats |
|------|--------|-------------|-----|-------------|------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| 1999 | 3 | 109 | 12 | 360 | 0 | 36 | 1 | 36 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2003 | 4 | 109 | 21 | 360 | 0 | 36 | 2 | 36 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2007 | 9 | 109 | 25 | 360 | 1 | 36 | 6 | 36 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2011 | 7 | 109 | 26 | 360 | 0 | 36 | 3 | 36 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2015 | 8 | 109 | 22 | 360 | 0 | 36 | 4 | 36 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2019 | 8 | 109 | 13 | 360 | 0 | 36 | 3 | 36 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2023 | 4 | 109 | 17 | 360 | 0 | 36 | 8 | 36 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |

Source: Iruke on CDD March, 2024 Report

From the two tables above, it is discovered that since Nigeria returned to democratically governance in 1999, there seems to be a fair participation of women in the political landscape in the country more importantly in both elective and appointive positions. In the year 1999, there were only just three women in the Senate out of 109 and in the House of Representative 12 out of 360 representing 2.5 and 3.3 per cents respectively. There was an increase in



women political participation in the elective positions between 1999 and 2007, in 2007 particularly the number of women that participated in the elective positions increased to nine female Senators and 25 House of Representative members and in 2011, seven Senators and 26 House of Representative members. This was the last time women had such high number of female Senators coupled with that of Representative members till date in Nigeria political sphere before the figure began to dwindle. Presently, there are four female Senators and 17 female House of Representative members which is 2.8 percent and 4.4 percent respectively. This is still very far from what Affirmation Actions declared. Presently in Nigeria, the posts of the President, Vice President and that of the State Governors have not been conquered by the women fold and it has almost become a trend and those positions have become men dominated seats since the return of democracy in Nigeria in the year 1999.

The matter is not different from what obtains in the South western part of the country going by what the table 3 below shows as concerning the distributions of women's representation in the State House of Assemblies:

Table 3: Distribution of women's representation in the HoA in the six states of the southwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria from 1999 to 2023

| State | Number of Seats | Number of Women Elected | | | | | | | State Total |
|-------|-----------------|-------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------------|
| | | 1999 | 2003 | 2007 | 2011 | 2015 | 2019 | 2023 | |
| Lagos | 40 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 28 |
| Ekiti | 26 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 17 |
| Ogun | 26 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 13 |
| Ondo | 26 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 9 |
| Oyo | 32 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 7 |
| Osun | 26 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Total | 176 | 3 | 5 | 10 | 15 | 12 | 14 | 17 | 176 |

Sources: Legislative records in the selected House of Assemblies and INEC database (2024).

The record above indicates that, at the return of democratic structure in 1999, only Lagos State gave the opportunity to women to occupy elective positions where we had just 3 (three) female House of Assembly members which represents 7.5 percent. Although Lagos State remains the leading State in Southwest having the largest number of female as members of the State House of Assembly which stood at 17.5 percent in 2011 and it has since dropped to 4 members in 2023 election which represents 7.5 percent. Generally, Lagos, Ekiti and Ogun States are doing well by allowing women to participate actively or given them level ground to participate in the elective positions since the return to democratic governance in 1999. States like Ondo, Oyo and Osun

are not doing well in the area of women participation in political struggles since 1999. In fact, only 2 women have been elected into Osun State House of Assembly since 1999, and in 2023 general election none represents the women fold in the State House of Assembly, it is all men dominated house.

Presently in Nigeria, the post of the State Governors seems to be non-contestable for the women fold and it has almost become a trend. Although some of the State Governors have female Deputies while the Governor's seat has almost become men dominated seats since the return of democracy in Nigeria in 1999. Several efforts are being made from the states to correct the imbalance. However, there could be reasons responsible for the dwindling in the number of women participating in political struggles in Southwest Nigeria.

This paper seeks for a review of the various forms of electoral irregularities in Southwest, Nigeria coupled with the reasons for women's low political participation especially in the areas of elective and appointive positions and lastly, look into the impact of such low political participation on women development at large.

Forms of Electoral Irregularities in Southwest, Nigeria

Electoral irregularities in Southwest, Nigeria manifests in various forms, undermining the integrity of the electoral process and further necessitating women's low political participation. Here are some of the most significant forms:

Bribery and Conspiracy

This involves offering money or gifts to voters, electoral officials, or other candidates to influence the outcome of elections. Bribery is a pervasive electoral irregularity in Nigeria, where candidates or their agents offer money or gifts to voters before, during and after election, electoral officials, or other candidates to influence the outcome of elections. Conspiracy also plays a role, where individuals or groups work together to manipulate or influence the electoral process, here party leadership collude with the electoral umpire to manipulation the election results in favour of a particular candidate. This occurs when individuals or groups use coercion, manipulation, or exploitation to influence voters' decisions. Undue influence can take many forms, including threats, violence, or spiritual manipulation. Traditional rulers, employers, landlords, and government officials often wield significant influence over voters. The Electoral Act 2010 prohibits bribery and conspiracy, with penalties including fines and imprisonment. Although, this is contained in the Act, but the question is how many



person has been prosecuted? The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) should wake up to the task and continue with the good work that was done in Bauchi State about two chieftains of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in persons of Saleh Gamawa and Aminu Gadiya who were found guilty of trying to influence the outcome of 2015 general election in the state by offering a bribe of N142,460,000.00 (The Nation, 22 March, 2023). The duo were found guilty on two counts of conspiracy and money laundering.

Corruption

Corruption is a significant electoral irregularity in Nigeria, encompassing bribery, fraud, and other related offenses. Oluwagbohunmi (2017) posited that bribery and corruption is considered to be a great disease that is gradually destroying the socio-economic political and judicial system of Nigeria as bribery and corruption seem to be the order of the day among political office holders. Even when the politician know very well that, the election result was manipulated, they tell their opponents to go to court knowing fully well that nothing is going to come out of it just because the judiciary system which is considered as the last hope of the common man is no more so. Farotimi (2024) x-rays how powerful individuals and interests pride themselves above the law and subvert its sanctity for selfish gain even in the political sphere. Corruption can occur during voter registration, campaigning, or voting and during collation of election results. The glaring corruption and rot in the political space has raised concerns about the legitimacy of election outcomes and has eroded public trust in the electoral system (Mene, 2024). The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) was inaugurated to rid Nigeria of corruption through lawful enforcement and preventive measures and the institution is also expected to do the needful when it comes to electoral corruption in the country.

Electoral Violence

Electoral violence is a persistent threat to Nigeria's electoral process and has always characterized the political atmosphere which undermines the democratic structure of the country. Ever since the country gained independence in 1960, Nigeria's electoral processes have been rattled by all forms of violence. The 1964/65 election claimed more than 200 lives, especially in the southwest as a result of post-election violence (Adebajo, 2022). It was further stated that the deadliest and the worst case of electoral violence was witnessed in the country after the general election of 2011 where more than 800 people were killed including NYSC, Corp

members serving the mandatory one year programme for their fatherland and it lasted for over three days of rioting in 12 states across northern Nigeria (Adebajo, 2022). Violence can occur during campaigning, voting, or after election results are announced. This can intimidate voters especially women, disrupt the electoral process, and undermine the legitimacy of election outcomes which further causes women's low political participation as a good number of them could not withstand political violence.

Vote Buying and Selling

Vote buying and selling involve the exchange of money or gifts for votes. This practice has now become a norm in the political landscape of Nigeria as it is now openly negotiated between voters and party agents. In fact, in the countdown to 2023 elections, various sources sent out alerts warning of vote buying on an unprecedented scale which was what actually took place. Price on vote ranges between ten thousand to twenty thousand naira only. This practice is not limited to election periods but started right from party primaries of almost all the political parties in the country. This practice undermines the integrity of the electoral process and can lead to the election of unqualified candidates where money bags politicians dictate the tone of election results. However, with modern technology, most of the tricks for vote-buying and selling can be tracked if the law enforcement agents really want to do their job (The Nations, March 22, 2023).

Rigging and Manipulation

Rigging and manipulation involve altering election results through fraudulent means. This can include ballot stuffing, voter intimidation, ballot box snatching, vote buying, fake voter registration, underage voting, voter suppression, disenfranchisement, altering election results, collusion with electoral officials, misuse of state resources, media bias, voter apathy, false declaration of results among others (Wikkitimes, 2023). Such activities are not activities that women can get involved in and so, many women desist from participating in political struggles because rigging and manipulation of election results are mostly men business.

Thuggery and Intimidation

Thuggery and intimidation involve using violence or threats to influence voters' decisions or disrupt the electoral process. Oni cited in Oluwagbohunmi (2017) defined political thuggery as the illegitimate means of seeking political power or any act of intimidation, violence, hooliganism, brutality or gangsterism, whether leading to death or



not, calculated to pose a threat or scare political opponents or perceived political opponents before, during or after elections which was aimed at achieving an undue political result or advantage over the opponents. This can further create a climate of fear and undermine the legitimacy of election outcomes and its integrity which is never in the nature of women to fathom.

Disenfranchisement

Disenfranchisement involves denying eligible voters the right to participate in elections. It is a tactic used to prevent eligible voters from casting their votes which could include purging voter rolls, requiring specific form of identification that certain group may not have, or closing polling stations in certain areas (Wikkitimes, 2023). This can further occur through voter suppression, voter intimidation, or manipulation of electoral rolls. This can occur right from voters' registration to voters' cards collection and doctoring of voters' lists. These electoral irregularities undermine the integrity of Nigeria's electoral process, erode women trust in democratic institutions, and can lead to social unrest and conflict. Addressing these irregularities is essential to strengthening Nigeria's democracy and ensuring the will of the people is reflected in election outcomes.

Reasons for Women' Low Political Participation

Women's low participation in politics in Southwest, Nigeria, can be attributed to several factors aside the electoral irregularities mentioned above. These are:

Religious and Social Barriers:

Religious and social barriers play a significant role, as women are often expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities over political engagement. Religious beliefs restrict women's participation in politics and promote a limited access to religious leadership positions upon which the men fold engaged in the misinterpretation of religious texts to justify women's exclusion from leadership positions especially in politics (Adefemi & Agunbiade, 2019). This was further heightened in the events that led to the 2023 general election especially in Adamawa State where Senator Aishatu Ahmed, otherwise called Binani contested for the Governorship election under the ruling APC. She was faced with religious persecution from clerics who opposed the idea of a woman being in leadership and this was expressed in social media, on broadcast stations and sometimes during Jumaat prayers (Nabordo, 2023). Most cultural values do not accord public role for women and it is believed that they must be submissive to their husbands, by implication, they are to be seen and not to be heard. This could also be one of many reasons

why women participation in politics is low in southwest, and not only in the northeast Nigeria and could further discouraged them from nursing such ambition in the nearest future.

Discrimination and Gender Bias

Discrimination and gender bias hinder women's ability to participate in politics despite Nigeria being a signatory to the declaration made at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and the 30% affirmative action declared by the National Gender Policy (NGP), the gender imbalance is still very obvious in the political landscape of the country which further deny women participation in decision making processes (Ejekwonyilo, 2022). This can manifest in various forms, including unequal access to education and information about politics and governance, economic opportunities, and healthcare. The educated do have an edge over the uneducated especially when it comes to politics. The erroneous belief of the aged in the past that a woman ends all her qualifications in the kitchen is gone. This has limited a lot of women in becoming figures to reckon with in the society if only they had been educated as education seems to be a factor for economic opportunities. Education is not only limited to ability to read and write but also creates awareness about rights and opportunities that are opened to women in politics. Furthermore, limited financial resources to fund political campaigns and dependence on husbands or male relatives for financial support further compound and attest to women low participation in politics (Adebayo & Olutayo, 2024).

Money Politics and Godfatherism

Money politics and godfatherism also pose significant challenges to women's participation in politics. The conflict arising from godfatherism has become one of the greatest problems facing the Nigerian political system. The high cost of running a political campaign and the influence of powerful political patrons can make it difficult for women to compete. Likewise, the aftermath or post-election crises between the godfather and political son could also serve as a bane for women low political participation. The billions of naira expended by Nigerian godfathers for bankrolling the elections of their godsons have totally monetized elections in Nigeria which automatically disqualifies men and women of honour, character and integrity from holding elected public positions. After the election, the holder of such political position becomes a stooge to the godfather because he that pays the piper dictates the tune. By the time the godson refuses to meet their (godfathers) demands, he is eventually impeached from political office or perpetually faced

with series of political crises throughout his tenure in the state. For instance, in Nigeria's fourth republic dispensation (1999 till date), the Saraki-Lawal face off, Nwobodo-Nnamani quagmire, Adedibu-Ladoja crisis, Uba-Ngige saga, Fubara-Wike, face off are major reference points to the problem of godfatherism in Nigeria politics (Edigin, (2010); Asogwa (2017) & The Guardian, October 31, 2024). The godfathers protesting crises in Nigeria do not only portray great danger to the country's democratic experiments, but also on the very essence and validity of the nation's existence. There is a gain saying in the political palace that whoever would contest for an election must be ready to put down a million naira notes and set it ablaze, the question now is 'how many women have the mind to do that or how many women can stand such mess arising between the godfather and godson?

Violence and Intimidation

Violence and intimidation are common experiences for women who attempt to participate in politics. This can include physical violence, sexual harassment, and intimidation, which can deter women from seeking political office or contesting for any political office. Oloyede (2021) posited that Nigerian elections have always been characterized by one form of violence or another since the return to democracy which do manifest before, during and after elections. Risk of sexual harassment and abuse during political events and rallies make many women to be discontent with participating in politics. With the current sexual harassments allegations levelled against the Senate President, Senator Akpabio by Senator Natasha, it will go a long way to disallow women from paying heed to contest for election in Nigeria (Arise TV, 2025). Women by their nature are peace loving cerebra and anything that would put that under threat, they run away from it, while the men believe that '*ibi to ba le la n ba omookunrin*' meaning 'men are courageous to be found in difficult terrains' including political arena. Fear of violence and intimidation during political campaigns and limited access to security protection for women politicians are other bane to women political participation in Southwest, Nigeria.

Lack of Representation and Opportunities

Lack of representation and opportunities contributes to women's low participation in politics. Women are under represented in decision-making positions, and there are limited opportunities for women to engage in politics and governance even in appointive positions. In the Tinubu administration that came into power in 2023, only seven women were given appointment as Ministers whether as

Minister of State or the Substantive Minister. When women are under represented especially where decisions are to be taken on issues patterning to women development and empowerment, women are being denied of their rights and other entitlements because no one is to speak for them.

Cultural and Traditional Practices

Traditional practices that restrict women's participation in public life especially the patriarchal culture which consider women as household wives and non-partisans in decision-making process even in the household not to talk about going out to the public to vie for political positions where she has limited access to decision-making positions in traditional institutions (Mofoluwawo, 2014 & Aliyu, 2016). Cultural norms that prioritize domestic roles over public engagement that women should be seen and not to be heard.

Media Representation

There are so many paparazzi in the Nigeria media organisations where women are not being represented very well and they are denied or limited by way of representation in media coverage of politics. Such media/information disorder may take various forms like sexualized content of the victims, sexist and posting of doctored images and video ridiculing their victims who are mostly women (Iruke, 2024). Many women are exposed to stigmatization and stereotypical portrayed by the social media and media houses about women in politics and effect of such information disorder are very dire which further affect their political career and social standing (Leadership, 2025). Therefore, women aspirants who ventured into politics are looked upon as shameless, useless and irresponsible, the case of Funke Akindele, Tonto Dikeh, and Princess Islamiyat Oyefuso rightly come to mind (Omotola, 2007; Onoboh, 2023). Women are not adequately and accurately favoured by the media houses because the aim of such disinformation is to portray women as unfit for leadership and this is a minus to women political participation in Southwest, Nigeria.

Institutional Barriers

It has been observed that women contribute greatly to electoral/political parties successes at the polls, but the found it very difficult to really have a full opportunity to contest for elective positions except when the men fold decided to use their discretion to impose or allow women to contest unopposed especially at the party primaries, this is due to limited access to political party structures and decision-making positions (Adebayo & Olatayo, 2024). Falola, (2021) further posited that institutional



barriers also encompasses the enactment of anti-gender-sensitive policies and laws with a biased electoral systems that favour male candidates at the expense of female candidates.

Impacts of Women's Low Political Participation

The impacts of women's low political participation are far-reaching and multifaceted.

Under-representation and Lack of Voice: Women's low participation in politics means they have limited representation in decision-making positions, resulting in their voices being unheard and their interests ignored. Women hold only 24.9 percent of parliamentary seats worldwide (IPU, 2022) and the case is not different in the South western part of Nigeria where women hold 9.66 percent going by the 2023 general election (see fig. 2 above). What this mean is that women's representation is often lower at national and local levels, perpetuating their under representation. To address this misnomer, the implementation of quotas and affirmative action policies must be vigorously pursued to increase women's representation in politics. In furtherance to women's political participation, societal and cultural barriers should be addressed to help create a more inclusive environment for women's participation in politics.

Inequality and Injustice: The under representation of women in politics perpetuates inequality and injustice, as women's perspectives and experiences are not taken into account in policy-making. The issues of inequality and injustice go beyond politics, it extends to economic, social, and human rights. Economically, women have limited influence over resource allocation, more likely to be employed in low-paying jobs with poor working conditions and having limited access to credit, financial facilities and other economic opportunities. Women under representation as a result of low political participation could further limit their influence over decisions that could affect their lives which further perpetuate social injustice. To address this, it is very important that women should let out their voice in promoting and protecting women's rights and empowerment through education, awareness-raising, and advocacy can help in addressing the issues of inequality and injustice.

Limited Access to Resources: Women's low participation in politics also means they have limited access to resources, including education and information resources, healthcare resources, socio-cultural resources and economic opportunities. More importantly, in the area of education, it has led to inadequate investment in girl-child education

perpetuating the gender gap in education and further reduce women's networks and decision-making power which is also a bane to their entrepreneurial endeavours. Health wisely, low political participation by women lead to restricted access to reproductive healthcare services including family planning, maternal healthcare and general mental health services/wellbeing. Economically, poverty is experienced by both men and women, however, global tendencies do suggest that women are the most vulnerable by it (Adebayo & Olutayo, 2024). In a patriarchal society like Nigeria which privileges men and where investment in women remains underwhelming, women face multiple of challenges in lifting themselves out of poverty which further limits their access to resources. Since many of the women who are interested in contesting for political positions do not appear to be self-sufficient (economically) enough to make independent choices either within the political party structure or as contestants, it becomes very imperative of them to depend on the men for financial supports (Nwankwor, Manda & Nkereuwem, 2022 & Adebayo & Olutayo, 2024) which further exposes the women to other challenges like sexual harassments and other abuses.

Perpetuation of Stereotypes: The lack of women in politics perpetuates stereotypes and biases, making it even harder for women to participate in politics both in the present and the future if the bias/stereotypes are not addressed. This stereotypical tendencies do manifest with such statements as, women are care givers, women are emotional and irrational, women are submissive and powerless, and women are incompetent and unqualified. This was manifested in the events preceding the 2011 primary elections of PDP where Sarah Jubril contested as the only female presidential candidate but ended up receiving just only a single vote. This connotes that women themselves exhibit stereotypic tendencies among themselves (Obot, 2020; PM news 2011 & Adebayo & Olutayo, 2024). To address this, there is need to encourage and support women's leadership development which can assist to challenge stereotypes and promote gender equality. Also, educating people about the harm caused by stereotypes and promoting awareness about women's contributions and achievements can help challenge and change these stereotypes

Impact on Development: Women's low participation in politics hinders the development of women in the States, as women's perspectives and experiences are essential for creating inclusive and equitable policies that would usher in a better life and capacity building for the women-fold. It is assumed



that when there is higher numbers of women in the parliaments, they seem to advocate a stronger attention to women's and children issues better than their male counterpart in the house. And this will go a long way for women and children development in the sub-region. The more women that are empowered politically, the more the number of women who will be available to contribute maximally to the development of women and the society at large.

Conclusion

The impacts of women's low political participation in Southwest, Nigeria are significant, and addressing this issue is crucial for creating a more inclusive and equitable society. Addressing electoral irregularities is crucial to strengthening Nigeria's democracy and ensuring the integrity of the electoral process especially in the Southwest, Nigeria. To increase women's participation in politics, it is essential to address the structural barriers and biases that exist within political parties. This can involve implementing gender quotas bearing in mind the Affirmation Action, providing training and resources for women candidates, and promoting a culture of inclusivity and equality. For elections to be genuinely democratic, women must have equal opportunities to participate in every stage of the electoral process just like their male counterpart, by not limiting their political participation to only casting votes but being actively involved in contesting for both elective and appointive positions. This includes having an equal chance to hold positions in ward, local and national election management bodies, serving as election monitors or observers, and participating fully in all aspects of political party operations, meaning that party meetings should not be fixed in the ungodly hours of the night. Women's equal participation is crucial for achieving gender equality and genuine democracy. It is therefore suggested that godfatherism should not be treated as a party affair, but should be offered political, social and legal treatment by the government and the stakeholders in Nigeria.

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