

GENDER AND POLITICS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the intricate interplay between gender dynamics and political processes within the Nigerian context, shedding light on the challenges, progress, and prospects for women's political participation and influence. The study dwelt heavily on the array of existing secondary sources of information and utilizes the Intersectionality Theory as the framework of analysis. Findings from the research revealed that gender disparities in Nigerian politics persist, with women significantly being underrepresented in political offices. Gender stereotypes have shaped perceptions of leadership and influenced the evaluation of male and female politicians. Women have faced challenges within political parties, including limited access to leadership positions, resources, and support networks. Cultural norms, gender-based violence, resource constraints, and legal barriers have continued to impede women's political participation. The colonial legacy in Nigeria has enduring effects on gender dynamics. However, there is evidence of progress, with growing women's activism and advocacy efforts. The study concluded that gender and politics in Nigeria are marked by complex challenges influenced by cultural, historical, and social factors. Although progress has been made, significant barriers to women's political participation and representation remain. Sequel to the findings and conclusion, the study recommended amongst other things that governments at all levels should strengthen the implementation and enforcement of gender quotas and affirmative action policies to increase women's representation in political offices; Political Parties to promote public awareness campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes and educate voters about the importance of women's participation in politics.

Key Words: *Gender, Politics, Nigeria, Intersectionality, Political Parties*

Introduction

Gender and politics are intrinsically linked in any society, and Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and one of its largest democracies, is no exception. The study of gender and politics in Nigeria is of paramount importance due to its potential to reshape the nation's political landscape, improve governance, and foster greater gender equality. Nigeria's political terrain has undergone significant transformations since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1960 (Falola, 2008). While these changes have brought about increased opportunities for women's involvement in politics, they have also exposed persistent structural and cultural barriers that hinder their full participation.

Historically, Nigeria has had a complex political history with diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, shaping its political landscape. This diversity extends to gender roles and relations within society. Traditionally, the Nigerian society was characterized by distinct gender roles that limited women's political participation, relegating them to the domestic sphere. However, Nigeria's political evolution has seen notable shifts in gender dynamics. The post-independence era witnessed the emergence of women's political activism, exemplified by figures like Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Gambo Sawaba who played a pivotal role in advocating for women's rights and political engagement. Despite these early efforts, it was only in recent decades that concerted efforts were made to address gender disparities in Nigerian politics (Johnson-Odim & Mba (1997).

Nigeria's political system is characterized by multi-party democracy, and women have made significant inroads into party politics, party participation, securing key leadership positions. Notably, Nigeria introduced affirmative action policies, such as the National Gender Policy, to promote women's inclusion in political decision-making processes. Additionally, international conventions and agreements, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), have influenced gender-related legislation and policy in Nigeria. However, while progress has been made, numerous challenges persist. Women continue to face deep-seated sociocultural, economic, and structural barriers to political participation and empowerment. Instances of violence against women in politics (VAWIP) have raised concerns about the safety of female politicians. Furthermore, balancing the demands of political careers with traditional gender roles remains a challenge for many women in Nigeria (UN Women Nigeria, 2021).

From 2019, Nigeria has witnessed a growing youth population and

increasing engagement with technology, which may reshape the landscape of gender and politics. Young women and men are actively advocating for gender equality and using digital platforms to mobilize support for women in politics (UNDP, 2019). Kassa (2015) had earlier averred that the participation of women in political decision making was recognized as a political right after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. Its Articles 2 and 21 impose equal possession of political rights without discrimination on the basis of sex or on any other ground. Similarly, the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, Article 15(2) and Article 42(1) (a) and (b), (2) and (3) forbid discrimination on the basis of sex. But sadly, Nigerian women are under-represented in decision making positions.

In a liberal and representative Democracy, citizens have equal rights to participate in the management of public affairs (Onyishi, 2020), and yet Women marginalization in politics is noted to be a global problem. For instance, based on the 2019 United Nations (UN Women, 2019) Report, women occupy only 24.3% of the National Parliaments. The report further observes that about 38 countries have less than 10% of their women in the parliament. Globally, only 17% of Cabinet Ministers are women (Raji, 2023). In Nigeria, women are also disproportionately marginalized in politics. For instance, the National Assemblies are dominated by men, in 1999, only 2.8% of Senators were women, in 2007, it increased to 3.6%, in 2011, it further increased to 8.5%, in 2015, and reduced to 6.6% in 2019 (Ohaju, 2022). In the House of Representatives in 1999, only 3.3% of the members were women, in 2003, 6.3%, 7.2% in 2007, they were also 7.2% in 2011 and 3% in 2019 ((Ohaju, 2022). In the recent 2023 elections, out of 423 National Assembly seats, women got only 15 seats representing 3.5% (Raji, 2023). Nigeria has never elected a female President or female Governor.

This research therefore, examined the intricate interplay between gender dynamics and political processes within the Nigerian context, shedding light on the challenges, progress, and prospects for women's political participation and influence. The study of gender and politics in Nigeria is a multifaceted inquiry into the evolving roles, challenges, and prospects for women in Nigerian politics. By examining the historical context, legal frameworks, political parties, and ongoing barriers, this chapter examined the expression of gender dynamics in Nigerian politics and advanced proposals for fostering greater gender equality in politics particularly in the areas of participation, leadership recruitment and decision-making processes.

Conceptual Issues

Gender refers to the socially and culturally constructed roles, behaviors, expectations, and identities that societies ascribe to individuals based on their

perceived or assigned sex. It encompasses a spectrum of roles and attributes associated with femininity and masculinity and goes beyond the binary concept of male and female. A common definition of gender is provided by the World Health Organization (WHO, IFES,2020), which states that, "Gender refers to the roles, behaviors, activities, expectations, and societal norms that cultures consider appropriate for men and women. Understanding and recognizing gender as a social construct is essential for promoting gender equality and eliminating discrimination. It is crucial to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and promote policies and practices that ensure equal opportunities and rights for all genders. On the other hand, Politics refers to the process of governance and decision-making within a society or a community. It encompasses the activities, institutions, and actions related to the distribution and exercise of power, authority, and resources. Politics involves making and implementing policies, laws, and regulations that affect the lives of individuals and groups within a society. A widely accepted definition of politics comes from Harold Lasswell, who stated that politics is "the process of who gets what, when, and how."(Osundina,2019).

Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes the Intersectionality theory developed and introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American legal scholar, critical race theorist, and civil rights advocate. She first articulated the concept of intersectionality in her work, titled: "*Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*," published in (1989). The main assumptions of Intersectionality Theory include:

- I. Intersectionality recognizes that individuals have multiple social identities, such as gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and more. These identities intersect and interact to shape a person's experiences and opportunities.
- ii. The theory posits that different forms of oppression (such as sexism, racism, homophobia amongst others) do not operate independently; rather, they intersect and compound, leading to unique and multifaceted experiences of discrimination and disadvantage. Intersectionality highlights how some aspects of an individual's identity may be highly visible and subject to discrimination (For example, being a woman of color), while other aspects may be invisible or less salient in certain contexts.
- iii. It acknowledges that the experiences of individuals at the intersections of multiple identities may differ significantly from those who do not share the same intersecting identities. For example, the experiences of a Black woman may differ from those of a White

woman or a Black man. Intersectionality theory is rooted in the pursuit of social justice. It emphasizes the need to recognize and address the structural and systemic inequalities that result from intersecting forms of discrimination.

- iv. Moreover, Intersectionality has practical implications for advocacy, policymaking, and social change. It calls for policies and interventions that take into account the complexity of individuals' identities and experiences to create more equitable and inclusive societies.

While Intersectionality Theory has been influential and widely recognized for its contributions to understanding the complex experiences of individuals with intersecting identities, it has also faced some criticisms and discussions within academic and activist circles. Critics argue that the theory's emphasis on the complexity of intersecting identities can make it challenging to operationalize and apply in practice. They contend that the theory's utility may be limited when trying to address real-world issues (McCall, 2005). Some scholars caution against essentializing identities, suggesting that Intersectionality Theory can inadvertently reinforce stereotypes by attributing specific characteristics or experiences to certain groups (Hancock, 2016).

Furthermore, there are concerns that Intersectionality Theory's focus on particular identities or experiences may unintentionally exclude or overlook other forms of intersectionality, such as those related to disability or religion (Crenshaw, 2016). Critics such as Cho, Crenshaw and McCall argue that the theory, while valuable for understanding complex identities, may not provide clear guidance for policy or activism. There's a need for more specific strategies and solutions to address intersectional discrimination (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2016). While the theory primarily addresses intersecting oppressions, some argue that it should also consider how individuals may experience intersectional privilege, which can have implications for power dynamics (Nash, 2008). Intersectionality Theory emerged in the context of U.S. legal and social justice discussions, and critics argue that it may not adequately account for the diversity of cultural and global contexts (Hankivsky, Grace, Hunting, Giesbrecht, Fridkin, Rudrum & Ferlatte, 2017).

Despite criticism against the Intersectionality theory, it is highly relevant in explaining gender and politics in Nigeria. Nigeria, like many other countries, is marked by diverse social identities, cultures, and inequalities, and intersectionality provides a valuable framework to understand how these intersecting factors shape the experiences of women in politics. Nigeria is

characterized by a diverse population with multiple ethnic groups and religious affiliations. Intersectionality theory recognizes that women from different ethnic and religious backgrounds may face distinct forms of discrimination and varying opportunities in politics (Crenshaw, 2016).

Women in Nigeria may experience multiple forms of discrimination based on their gender, ethnicity, religion, and social class. Intersectionality theory helps elucidate how these intersecting axes of identity can compound disadvantages and create unique challenges for women in politics (McCall, 2005). Intersectionality theory underscores how the interaction of gender with other social identities influences women's political participation. For instance, cultural norms, religious beliefs, and historical factors may vary among different ethnic groups and can affect women's involvement in politics (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013). Recognizing the intersectionality of identities is crucial for formulating effective policies and interventions. Policies that take into account the multifaceted identities of women in Nigeria can be more targeted and responsive to their specific needs and challenges (Hankivsky, Grace, Hunting, Giesbrecht, Fridkin, Rudrum & Ferlatte, 2017).

Intersectionality theory helps shed light on both the challenges and opportunities for women's political engagement. It acknowledges that women's experiences in politics are not uniform and that strategies for advancing gender equality in politics must consider these variations (Nash, 2008). This is because Nigeria's political landscape is characterized by complex power dynamics influenced by ethnicity, religion, and gender. Intersectionality theory offers insights into how these dynamics interact and affect women's ability to access political power and influence (Hancock, 2016).

Historical Perspective on women Political Participation in Nigeria

In pre-colonial Nigeria, women played significant roles in various aspects of political life, contributing to the governance and decision-making processes of their communities. These roles were diverse and multifaceted, often varying by ethnic group and geographical region. In many Nigerian societies, women were responsible for agricultural activities, trading, and controlling economic resources. This economic influence translated into power and influence within their communities. For instance, the Igbo women of southeastern Nigeria were known for their active involvement in trade networks and had considerable economic autonomy. Women often held positions of importance in religious and ritual practices. They served as priestesses and custodians of religious traditions in various ethnic groups, such as the Yoruba and Igbo (Njoku, 1985). These roles allowed women to wield spiritual authority and influence social and political decisions.

In some regions, women participated in local decision-making councils or councils of elders. They were consulted on matters related to community affairs, and their perspectives were considered in the decision-making process. Women played essential roles in conflict resolution and mediation (Suleiman, 2014). Their ability to bring parties together and negotiate settlements was highly valued in pre-colonial Nigerian societies. Some Nigerian societies had female rulers and queens. For example, the Iyalode among the Yoruba and the Nneoha among the Igbo held influential positions in their respective societies, contributing to political leadership and governance (Smith, 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

The advent of colonialism in Nigeria had a profound impact on gender dynamics, significantly altering the roles and status of women. The colonial period, which lasted from the late 19th century until Nigeria's independence in 1960, brought about several changes. Colonial powers introduced legal systems that were often patriarchal in nature, leading to the erosion of women's traditional rights and powers. These legal systems limited women's ownership of land and property and restricted their participation in decision-making processes. Colonial policies disrupted traditional economic structures, undermining women's economic autonomy. Cash crops and wage labor systems favored men, leading to a shift in economic power dynamics (Smith, 2006).

The colonial period saw the spread of Western education, but educational opportunities were initially limited for women. Nevertheless, the introduction of formal education eventually provided some Nigerian women with tools to challenge traditional gender roles and advocate for women's rights. Christian missionaries played a significant role in education and healthcare during the colonial era. While they offered educational opportunities to some women, they also propagated European gender norms, which often reinforced patriarchal structures.

The early 20th century witnessed the emergence of women's political activism in Nigeria, marked by efforts to address gender inequalities and advocate for women's rights. Women in various regions began forming organizations to advocate for their rights. Notably, the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) was founded in 1946 and became a symbol of women's activism. The AWU protested against taxation policies and other grievances, demonstrating the power of collective action. A few women, such as Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, were at the forefront of political activism. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was a prominent activist who campaigned for women's suffrage and social justice. She played a crucial role in raising awareness about women's issues and advocating for change (Njoku; 1985; Smith, 2006; Onyishi, 2020).

Women also became increasingly involved in the broader political landscape. They participated in party politics and contributed to the struggle for Nigeria's independence from colonial rule. Women's activism and advocacy efforts played a role in shaping the political landscape in Nigeria. Their contributions to the struggle for independence paved the way for discussions about women's rights in the post-colonial era (Njoku, 1985).

Women Political Representation Since Independence

The participation of women in Nigerian government has evolved over the years, reflecting both progress and persistent challenges. Nigeria, a diverse and populous nation, has seen women occupy various political roles, including positions at the federal, state, and local levels. Despite this, women's representation in political leadership remains limited. Nigeria has had female leaders in various capacities, including ministers, governors, and legislators. Notable women like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala have held key ministerial positions, and several women have served as deputy governors in different states. However, women's presence in executive and legislative branches remains below their male counterparts. (Schin 2007, Osudina). For instance, during the recent 2023 election, out of a total of 15,307 candidates that contested election under the 18 registered parties, 13,754 were men representing 89.8%, whereas only 1,553 were women representing 10.1% (Zagi, 2023).

Despite some progress, Nigerian women continue to face numerous challenges when it comes to political participation. These challenges occasioned by deep-rooted cultural and societal norms often limit women's ability to participate in politics. Traditional gender roles and expectations can discourage women from pursuing political careers. Also, women in politics in Nigeria face violence and intimidation, which can deter them from running for office or engaging in political activities. This phenomenon, known as Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWIP), includes physical and psychological violence.

Women often have limited access to financial resources and campaign funding. This hinders their ability to compete effectively in elections, especially against well-funded male candidates. For instance, to be involved in Nigerian politics, one has to be wealthy, nomination forms during the build up to the 2023 general election were very exorbitant. The ruling party, which is the All Progressive Congress (APC) sold their Presidential nomination form as high as 100 million naira, which is equivalent to 117,647.059 dollars while the main opposition party, Peoples Democratic Party sold theirs for 40 million naira, which is the equivalent of 47,058.823 dollars (Edeme, 2022). This technically, barred women from participation because of lack of

finances. Political parties in Nigeria have significant influence, and women may face barriers within party structures that limit their ability to secure party nominations for elective positions. Although Nigeria has legislation that supports gender equality in politics, implementation remains a challenge. Legal barriers and discrimination persist (Omeiza & Afolabi, 2020).

The Nigerian National Assembly consists of two chambers: The Senate and the House of Representatives. Women's representation in these chambers has been historically low. In the Senate, women occupied a limited number of seats, falling far short of the 109 total seats. Similarly, in the House of Representatives, out of the 360 seats, women holds only a fraction. In the recent 2023 elections, out of 423 National Assembly seats, women got only 15 seats representing 3.5% (Raji, 2023). Nigeria has never elected a female President or female Governor.

Efforts to increase women's representation have included advocacy for gender quotas and affirmative action policies. Nigeria's National Gender Policy, for instance, promotes gender balance in political positions. However, the full implementation and impact of such policies have been limited.

While the challenges of women's participation in Nigerian politics are considerable, there have been positive trends at the local level. More women have become visible in local politics, serving as councilors, local government chairpersons, and heads of traditional institutions. Women's groups and civil society organizations have actively advocated for greater female participation in local politics, leading to increased awareness and support for women candidates. Some Nigerian states have implemented governance reforms that promote gender inclusion in local government, which has resulted in more women participating in decision-making at the grassroots level. Women in Nigerian government have made notable strides, but they continue to face significant challenges related to cultural norms, violence, resource constraints, and legal barriers. Women's representation in the Nigerian National Assembly remains disproportionately low, and efforts to address this issue are ongoing. Thus, positive trends at the local level suggest that women are gradually making inroads into Nigerian politics, contributing to the development and diversification of political leadership in the country (Onyishi, 2020).

Legal Framework: Gender-related Legislation in Nigeria

Nigeria has developed a framework of gender-related legislation aimed at promoting gender equality, protecting the rights of women, and addressing various forms of gender-based discrimination. These laws cover a wide range of issues, including political participation, education, employment, and violence against women. The National Gender Policy (NGP) launched in

2006, serves as a comprehensive guideline for addressing gender disparities in Nigeria. It provides a strategic framework for gender mainstreaming across all sectors of government and society. It serves as a roadmap for government ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) to mainstream gender considerations into their programs and activities. The NGP promotes gender mainstreaming across all sectors of government and society, including education, health, labor, and agriculture. It emphasizes the need to address gender disparities and inequalities at all levels. The NGP also advocates for the protection and advancement of women's rights. It addresses issues such as gender-based violence, economic empowerment, and access to education and healthcare for women and girls. Similarly, the NGP includes mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating progress in implementing gender-related policies and programs (Electoral Act, 2020). It encourages regular assessments of the impact of government interventions on gender equality. On the other hand, the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015, criminalizes various forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and female genital mutilation. It also provides for the protection and support of victims.

While the Child Rights Act, 2003 primarily focused on the rights of children, this act also addresses issues related to gender, including provisions against child marriage and harmful cultural practices. The National Policy on Education (NPE) contains provisions aimed at promoting gender equality in education, ensuring equal access to educational opportunities for girls and boys, and eliminating gender-based discrimination in schools. The Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018, although not exclusively a gender-related law, this act recognizes that women and girls with disabilities are often particularly vulnerable to discrimination and violence. It includes provisions for their protection and empowerment.

Despite the presence of gender-related legislation and the existence of the National Gender Policy, Nigeria faces several challenges in effectively implementing and enforcing these laws. Many people, including law enforcement officials and the general public, may not be fully aware of the existence and provisions of gender-related laws, leading to inadequate enforcement. Limited financial and human resources allocated to gender-focused programs and initiatives hinder effective implementation. This includes budgetary constraints for programs related to education, healthcare, and economic empowerment for women. Also, deep-seated cultural norms and traditional practices can pose significant barriers to the enforcement of gender-related laws. These norms may perpetuate gender-based discrimination and violence. Some government agencies responsible for gender mainstreaming and enforcement of gender-related laws may lack the

capacity and expertise to carry out their mandates effectively, coupled with overlapping and inconsistent legal frameworks can create confusion and hinder coordinated efforts to address gender-related issues (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Political Parties and Gender

Women's involvement in political parties is a critical aspect of their participation in the political process. Political parties serve as the primary platforms for individuals to contest elections, shape policies, and influence governance. In Nigeria, as in many other countries, women have actively engaged with political parties, although their participation has been characterized by both opportunities and challenges. Women join political parties as members and activists, participating in party activities such as campaign rallies, voter mobilization, and grassroots organizing. Some women rise to leadership positions within political parties, including roles as party chairpersons, women's wings leaders, and youth leaders. Women in political parties often advocate for gender-sensitive policies and gender equality within their party platforms (Babatunde & Amao, 2018).

Women are often underrepresented in key decision-making positions within political parties, including executive committees and candidate selection committees. Discrimination and gender bias can affect women's experiences within political parties, limiting their influence and opportunities for advancement. Women may face challenges in accessing financial resources and support networks within political parties, which can affect their competitiveness in elections.

To address the underrepresentation of women in politics, Nigeria has implemented gender quotas and affirmative action policies within political parties. These policies aim to increase women's participation by requiring parties to reserve a certain percentage of party positions and electoral candidates for women. Nigeria's legal framework includes provisions for gender quotas and affirmative action. For example, the Electoral Act of 2010, as amended, mandates that political parties ensure a minimum of 35% of their candidates are women for all elective positions (Osioma, 2016). While gender quotas exist at the national level, their implementation can vary among political parties. Some parties are more committed to complying with these provisions than others. Gender quotas have contributed to an increase in the number of women contesting elections and holding party positions. However, the effectiveness of these policies in achieving gender equality remains a subject of debate.

The internal structures of political parties can significantly influence women's participation and advancement in politics. Political parties'

nomination processes can either facilitate or hinder women's candidacy. Transparent and inclusive nomination processes can lead to more women being selected as candidates. The culture within political parties, including attitudes toward gender and women's roles, plays a crucial role in shaping women's experiences. A party culture that values gender equality is more likely to attract and retain women members. Women often face challenges in accessing financial and organizational resources within political parties. Limited access to campaign funding and support networks can be a barrier to their political ambitions. The presence of women's wings or caucuses within political parties can provide a support system for women politicians, offering mentorship, networking opportunities, and advocacy for gender-related issues (Osundina, 2019).

Women's involvement in political parties is essential for their participation in the political process. Gender quotas and affirmative action policies have been implemented in Nigeria to increase women's representation within political parties and elective positions. However, the impact of these policies varies, and women continue to face challenges related to party structures, resources, and gender discrimination. Addressing these challenges and promoting gender equality within political parties is crucial for enhancing women's participation in Nigerian politics (Osundina, 2019).

Gender and Election Dynamics in Nigeria

Gender dynamics play a significant role in election campaigns in Nigeria, influencing candidates' strategies, media coverage, and voter perceptions. Male and female candidates often adopt different campaign strategies due to societal expectations and gender norms. Female candidates may emphasize issues related to social welfare, healthcare, and education to connect with voters, while male candidates may focus on traditional security and economic concerns. Gender biases can affect media coverage of election campaigns. Female candidates may receive less media attention or may be portrayed differently from their male counterparts. Stereotypes and sexist language can further reinforce gender disparities in campaign reporting. Gender biases can also shape voter perceptions of candidates. Stereotypes and preconceived notions about women's leadership abilities may affect how voters assess female candidates. Studies have shown that female candidates are often subjected to harsher scrutiny and held to higher standards. Gender-based violence and intimidation, known as Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWIP), can impact female candidates' campaigns. Threats and acts of violence may deter women from participating in elections or engaging in active campaigning (Ibeanu, 2019).

Voter behavior in Nigeria is influenced by various gender-related factors: Voting patterns in Nigeria can exhibit gender differences. Some studies suggest that women and men may prioritize different issues when casting their votes, reflecting their distinct roles and concerns within society. Traditional gender norms and cultural expectations can shape voter behavior. Women may be more likely to follow the guidance of male family members or community leaders in their voting choices.

Women's organizations and advocacy groups have played a role in mobilizing female voters and encouraging them to participate actively in the electoral process. Women's access to education and empowerment opportunities can impact their political engagement. Educated women may be more likely to vote, seek elected office, and support gender-sensitive policies (Omeiza & Afolabi, 2020).

Women's issues on the political agenda in Nigeria encompass a broad range of concerns related to gender equality and women's rights. The prevalence of gender-based violence, including domestic violence and sexual harassment, is a significant concern. Advocacy for legal reforms and support for victims are essential components of the political agenda. Policies and initiatives aimed at promoting women's economic empowerment, including access to credit, business opportunities, and entrepreneurship training, are critical for addressing gender disparities in economic participation. Ensuring equal access to quality education for girls and boys is a key agenda item (Onu, 2019). Improving educational opportunities for girls and addressing barriers to their schooling are important priorities.

Access to reproductive healthcare, maternal health services, and family planning are important issues on the political agenda, given their impact on women's health and well-being. Advocacy for increased representation of women in political positions is ongoing. This includes efforts to promote gender quotas and affirmative action policies to address the underrepresentation of women in elective offices. Advocacy for legal reforms to address gender discrimination and promote women's rights is a central part of the political agenda. This includes issues like inheritance rights and legal protections against gender-based violence (Onu, 2019).

Gender dynamics in election campaigns, voter behavior, and women's issues on the political agenda are interconnected elements that shape the political landscape in Nigeria. While progress has been made in raising awareness about gender-related concerns and promoting gender equality, challenges related to gender biases, violence, and societal norms continue to influence political dynamics. The active engagement of women's organizations and advocacy groups remains crucial for advancing women's rights and gender equality in Nigeria's political arena (Ibeanu, 2019).

Gender and Challenges in Political Leadership Participation

Gender stereotypes often influence perceptions of leadership and can impact how individuals are evaluated in leadership roles. In many societies, including Nigeria, traditional gender roles and biases persist, affecting how men and women are perceived as leaders. Gender stereotypes can lead to biased perceptions of leadership qualities. Traits such as assertiveness, decisiveness, and confidence are often associated with male leaders, while qualities like empathy, collaboration, and nurturing are more commonly attributed to female leaders (Oyewumi, 1997). Women in leadership roles may face scrutiny and double standards. They may be judged more harshly for exhibiting behaviors that are deemed assertive or ambitious, which might be celebrated in male leaders.

Gender stereotypes contribute to the "glass ceiling" phenomenon, where women face barriers to advancing into top leadership positions (Eagly; Johannesen-Schmidt & Van Engen, 2003). These stereotypes can limit women's access to opportunities for career progression. Also, gender stereotypes can influence individuals' career choices and aspirations. Women may be less likely to pursue leadership roles due to perceived barriers and societal expectations.

Balancing family responsibilities with a political career is a challenge that affects both male and female politicians, but women often face unique pressures and expectations. Gender norms often place the primary responsibility for caregiving on women. Female politicians may face criticism or guilt-tripping for prioritizing their careers over family, making the balance particularly challenging. The availability of support systems, such as extended family, partners, or domestic help, can influence a politician's ability to balance family and career. These support systems are often critical for women in politics (Paludi, 2012).

The presence of family-friendly policies, such as parental leave and flexible working arrangements, can facilitate a better work-life balance for politicians. Advocacy for such policies is essential to support both male and female politicians. Female politicians who successfully balance family and political careers can serve as role models and mentors for others, helping to dispel the notion that political leadership is incompatible with family life (Eagly; Johannesen-Schmidt & Van Engen, 2003).

Gender can influence leadership styles, although it's important to note that individuals vary widely in their leadership approaches regardless of gender. Transformational leadership, characterized by charisma, inspiration, and a focus on team development, is often associated with both male and female leaders. Women leaders may excel in this style, emphasizing

collaboration and inclusivity. Transactional leadership, which relies on rewards and punishments, is less associated with women. However, some female leaders may adopt transactional elements when necessary.

Eagly; Johannesen-Schmidt & Van Engen, (2003), aver that Laissez-faire leadership, characterized by a hands-off approach, is also less gender-specific. Leadership style often depends on an individual's personality and context. Gender stereotypes can affect how leadership styles are perceived. A female leader employing a more assertive or directive style may face backlash due to the dissonance with traditional gender roles. Effective leaders often adapt their leadership styles to the situation. This adaptability is not inherently gendered but reflects the ability to respond flexibly to changing circumstances.

Conclusion

The study has revealed that Women remain significantly underrepresented in Nigerian politics, holding a limited number of political offices at the federal, state, and local levels. Gender stereotypes persist, influencing perceptions of leadership and affecting how male and female politicians are evaluated. As a result, Women continue to face challenges within political parties, including limited access to leadership positions, resources, and support networks. The study also discovered that barriers to women's political participation include cultural and societal norms, gender-based violence, resource constraints, and legal barriers. The colonial legacy in Nigeria has had lasting effects on gender dynamics, including the introduction of patriarchal legal systems and disruptions to traditional structures.

Despite challenges, women's political activism has been on the rise in Nigeria, with increased participation in advocacy, grassroots organizing, and the broader political landscape. Gender disparities in Nigerian politics persist, with women facing numerous challenges in achieving equal representation and influence. Gender stereotypes and cultural norms continue to affect how women are perceived as leaders, impacting their access to political power. However, there is evidence of progress, with growing women's activism and advocacy efforts.

Recommendations

- i. Governments at all levels should strengthen the implementation and enforcement of gender quotas and affirmative action policies to increase women's representation in political office.
- ii. Political Parties to Promote public awareness campaigns to challenge

- gender stereotypes and educate voters about the importance of women's participation in politics.
- iii. Women bodies should create and expand support networks for women in politics, including mentoring programs, to help them navigate political challenges and also collaborate with international organizations and partners to share best practices and resources for advancing gender equality in politics
 - iv. Political parties should implement internal reforms that promote gender equality, such as inclusive candidate selection processes and holding of leadership positions within the party system.
 - v. Advocacy for legal reforms that address gender discrimination and violence against women in politics should be strengthened to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable.
 - vi. The government, donor agencies should invest in education and empowerment programs for women and girls to equip them with the skills and confidence to engage in politics.
 - vii. Researches should improve data collection and research on gender and politics to better understand the barriers and opportunities for women's participation.

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