

**Democratic Governance: Quest for Gender Exclusivity on Political Participation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Myth or Reality**

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**Abstract**

*The paper examines the imperative of political participation in Nigeria democratic governance during the fourth republic. It observes that there is intense marginalization and subjugation of Nigerian women in democratic governance despite Nigeria's ratification of virtually all global agitations on protection and promotion of women's rights and equality. Therefore, this paper examines the effects of women's political participation on democratic governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, as well as the socio-economic factors hindering active participation of women in Nigerian political scene. Methodologically, the study adopts both qualitative and quantitative technique of gathering relevant information and materials. Subsequently, content analysis was employed in the interpretation of documents, reports and journal publications obtained from the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies, National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), and African Centre for Democratic Governance. The findings of this study reveal that Nigerian women have been under-represented in the political scene. The study therefore recommends that government should introduce national value re-orientation that will enhance the political participation of women as well facilitate the creation of a democratic space for Nigerian women.*

**Keyword:** Women's Political Participation, Political Participation, Democratic Governance, Gender.

**Introduction**

Globally, the quest for sustainable democratic governance requires the active involvement and participation of women at all levels of government and in the contemporary democratic system. In that context, the role of women in democratic governance and nation building cannot be exaggerated. Promoting the active participation of women in democratic transition and consolidation in



Nigeria has established attention in the decision-making process of the government and not governmental organizations in the area of promoting good governance. The issue of equal or greater representation of women is considered very important for the proper development of the country, and the seriousness of it is reflected in the declaration on Affirmative action of the United Nations Conference on women (2000) in New York, where it was decided that 30 percent of all positions in government-owned companies and agencies should be given to women. For Nigeria, appropriated legislation related to the conference memorandum still needs discussed and implemented today. However, women are informed and encouraged by the women's movement and governments, notably the National Council of Women Societies the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and international agencies, be fully involved in the democratic process.<sup>1</sup>

A retrospective look at the political and developmental history of Nigeria suggests that adequate mechanism to promote women's participation in contemporary democratic governance has not been implemented, since the beginning of the fourth republic in 1999, Nigeria has experienced six (6) differences democratic transition programs that started in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019 respectively. Thus far, the role of female politics has been marginalized. Moreover, women's participation or empowerment is a sine qua non of democracy, so that any nation can relive the noble idea of democracy with its emphasis on participation, competition and freedom of societies, for the promotion of gender equality (parity). Any democratization process will be incomplete without the active participation of both genders.<sup>2</sup>

Specifically, this paper attempts to examine the socio-economic factors hindering active political participation of women in Nigerian democratic governance. This is done with a view to proffering the solutions and actions required to enhance political status of women as well as facilitate the creation of a democratic space for Nigerian women.

The paper is divided into six sections following the introduction, section two dwell in conceptual discourse, section three provides some theoretical consideration underlying the paper, section four provides an overview analysis of data and presentation of result on women's socio-economic representations in Nigerian. This is followed by the socio-economic factors militating (influence) against women's participation in democratic governance and politics. Section six concludes the paper and recommends the solutions and actions required to enhance the political status of women as well as facilitate the creation of a democratic space for Nigerian women,

## 2. Conceptual Discourse for the Study

The main concepts discussed in this paper relate to Women's Political

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<sup>1</sup> Anya, Okeke, (2013). Women and politics in Nigeria's fourth republic. The constitution: *A journal of constitutional development*. 3, (4), P. 67-91.

<sup>2</sup> Awofeso, O, and Odeyemi, I, I, (2014). Gender and political participation in Nigeria: A cultural perspective. *Journal of research in peace, gender and development*, (JRP GD). 4, (6), P. 41-59.

Participation, Political - participation, Democracy Governance, and Gender. Detailed explanation of the above concepts based on the opinion of scholars is provided below:

**a) Women's Political Participation:**

Women's political participation (representation) in politics (governance) should be seen from four viewpoints. Participation, Access, Representation and Transformation. Access to political institutions, participation (which includes control of power within such institutions), quantitative and qualitative representation and the end result will be social and political transformation in the polity. Women's political empowerment can be enhanced when these four conditions are fulfilled.<sup>3</sup>

**b) Political - Participation:**

Political participation refers to the degree and forms of participation of the people in governance and related institutions of society such as the economy and culture. In its active sense, it involves representation in political campaigns and debates, attending caucus or strategy meetings of political parties, voting during elections, standing as candidates for elections, and holding of government and party posts.<sup>4</sup>

**c) Democratic - Governance:**

Democratic governance refers to the governmental mechanism, process and institution that are function according to universal principles of democracy through the political values and norms within the society.<sup>5</sup>

**d) Gender:**

Gender is a social attribute associated with being male or female and the relationships among the masculine and feminine in the society.

**Theoretical Epistemology of the study**

The theoretical framework engaged for this study is Liberal feminism Theory (1784). This theory places emphasis on equal individual liberties for women and men in the society with sexual differences. Liberal feminism is the most widely accepted social and political philosophy among the feminists, which also postulated by May Wollstonecraft(1759-1797). Liberal feminism theory described the equal nationality of the sexes and stresses the importance of structuring social, familial, and sexual roles in ways that promote women's autonomous participation and self-fulfillment

**Relevance:**

The theory emphasises the similarities between men and women rather than the average difference between them, it attributes most of the personality and character differences between the sexes to the social construction of the gender,

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<sup>3</sup> Agbalajobi D. Taiye, (2010). "Women's participation and the political process in Nigeria: Problems and prospects". *African journal of political science and international relations*. 4, (2). P.75 - 78.

<sup>4</sup> Luka, R, (2011). "Women and political participation in Nigeria: The imperative of empowerment". *Journal of social science and public policy*. 3, (4). P. 24-37.

<sup>5</sup> National Democratic Institute, Democratic Governance, (2015). *Report of an NDI to review and appraise the achievements of the governance in Nigeria*. P. 41-67.

and tend to promote a single set of hermaphrodite virtues for both women and men in societies.

**Strength:**

Liberal feminist theory challenges male dominance and advocates social, political and economic equality of women and men in society. Thus, the theory recognised that some choices made by women are questionable because of the condition made by sexist social practices. They also tend to avoid materialism and any second guessing of those choices made without coercion or threats by the male counterpart within the egalitarian society.

**Limitation:**

The theory presumed that there is a strong claim of sexual difference that guarantee the different and potentially hierarchical rights and social roles. Liberal feminists otherwise avoid the promotion of particular conceptions of the good life for either men or women in the society, instead of defending a broad sphere of neutrality and privacy within which individual may pursue forms of life that is the most agreeable to them.

**4. Methodology (Overview Analysis of Data and Presentation of Result)**

This study was conducted by adopting the following methodology:

**Study Area:**

This study was conducted in southwestern geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Two states were used in southwestern Nigeria namely: Oyo and Osun states. To serve as representative sample of the study in Nigeria.

**Sampling Procedure and Sampling Size:**

The study which adopted a mixed method research design, was to examine the socioeconomic factors influencing women's participation in democracies within the selected States in southwestern Nigeria. Each of the selected states belongs differently to each of the two dominant political parties in Nigeria. While Oyo state is a Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) controlled State, Osun state is controlled by All Progressive Congress of Nigeria (APC). The choice of these two states as area of study therefore provided a platform for comprehensive investigation of women's political participation in Nigeria. In selecting the respondents, a total of One Hundred and fifty (150) respondents were randomly selected from the two (2) States in Southwestern Nigeria. Consequently, a total of three hundred (300) respondents were sampled.

Primary data were collected through the in-depth interviews and a well-structured questionnaire, while secondary data were gathered from the publication journals, books, annual reports and other documents from Gender and Development Action (GADA), Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies, National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), and African Centre for Democratic Governance. The questionnaire instrument focused on a number of factors that hindered women's participation at all levels of governance and in the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria. These factors reflect the range of the effect of women's participation on democratic governance in Nigeria's fourth republic, running the gamut from gaining insight into issues affecting the socio-economic factors within the levels of government.

**Analytical Procedure:**

Frequency distribution tables and percentages were used to analyse the effects of socio-economic factors hindering active political participation of women in Nigerian democratic governance. The socio-economic factors included sex, age, marital status, work experience, and educational status, number of children, religion, and occupation. Multiple regression analysis was used to quantitatively determine the effect of postulated socio-economic factors as a determinant independent variable on the dependent of women's participation in democratic governance in Nigeria fourth republic.

**Table 4.1:** Analysis of Data and Presentation of Result on Socio-economic Factors Hindering Active Political Participation of Women in Nigerian Democratic Governance.

<b>Table 4.1; Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents</b>		
<b>4.1.1: Age Distribution of Respondents</b>		
<b>Age (Years)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
21 – 30	104	34.7
31 – 40	148	49.3
41 – 50	38	12.7
51 – 60	300	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>4.1.2: Sex Distribution of Respondents</b>		
Male	149	49.7
Female	151	50.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>4.1.3: Distribution of Marital Status of Respondents</b>		
<b>Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Single	142	47.4
Married	103	34.3
Divorced	48	16
Widow	7	2.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>4.1.4: Occupational Distribution of Respondents</b>		
<b>Place of Work</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Civil Servants	141	47
Artisan	20	6.7
Trading	24	8
NGOs	23	7.7
Farming	15	5
Private Establishments	21	7
Others (students & unemployed)	56	18.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>4.1.5: Work Experience (Years) respondents</b>		
<b>Work Experience (Years)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1.5	24	8
6 – 10	38	12.7

11 - 15	56	18.7
16 - 20	78	26
>20	104	34.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>4.1.6: Educational Distribution of Respondents</b>		
<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Tertiary Education	163	54.3
Secondary Education	79	26.3
Primary Education	37	12.3
Adult Education	16	5.3
No formal Education (illiterate)	5	1.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>4.1.7: Distribution of Respondents Based on</b>		
<b>Types of Religion</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Christianity	124	41.3
Islam	95	31.7
Traditionalism	81	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>4.1.8: Distribution of Respondent Based on</b>		
<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1 - 3	162	54
6	75	25
7 - 9	40	13.3
>10	23	7.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field survey, 2021

**Table 4.2:** Indicate Participants' Responses on Socio-economic Factors Hindering Active Political Participation of Women in Nigerian Democratic Governance.

Variables	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly agree		Total	Total
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
<b>Socioeconomic factors</b>												
Gender inequality in education	19	6.3	79	25.3	93	30	102	34	91	30.4	300	100
Dearth of financial resources (Poverty)	15	5	39	13	45	15	118	39	83	27.7	300	100
<b>Cultural Factors</b>												
Patriarchal culture	19	6.3	76	25.3	10	3.3	227	42.3	68	22.8	300	100
Male Dominati on in the society	7	2.3	56	18.7	13	4.3	104	34.7	120	40	300	100
Women's multiple responsibilities	29	9.7	51	17	-	-	122	37.3	108	36	300	100
Religious binding	35	11.7	87	29	10	3.3	83	27.7	85	28.3	300	100
<b>Acrimonious Politics</b>												
The use of gangsters in Nigeria's politics	32	10.7	56	18.7	4	1.3	106	35.3	102	54	300	100
The use of thugs in Nigeria's political activities	40	13.3	50	16.7	5	1.7	64	21.3	41	47	300	100

The practice of godfatherism in Nigeria's politics	24	8	54	18	8	2.7	72	24	142	47.3	300	100
<b>Institutional Deigns</b>												
Majority Electoral System	25	83	30	10	23	7.7	128	42	94	31.3	300	100
Lack of Quotas system	35	11.7	19	63	14	4.7	120	40	112	37.3	300	100
Lack of provision for gender equality	20	6.7	24	8	4	1.3	122	40	130	43.3	300	100
<b>Historical Legacies</b>												
Legacy of Military role	64	21.3	60	20	57	18	88	29.3	31	10.5	300	100
Legacy of Colonialism	82	27.3	104	34.7	58	19.3	36	12	20	6.7	300	100
Naturally women have no interest in politics	106	35.3	117	39	40	13.3	24	8	13	4.4	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Presentation of Result on Socio-economic Factors Hindering Active Political Participation of Women in Nigerian Democratic Governance.

**Table 4.1.1;** the mean age of the respondents was 40.8 years. A higher proportion of respondents

148 (49.3%) were in the age group 31-40 years, followed by 104 (34.7%) in 21-30 years age group and only 10 (3.3%) were in age group 51-60 years.

**Table 4.1.2;** Half of the respondents 151 (50.3%) were females while 149 (49.7%) were males. **Table 4.1.3;** A higher proportion of the respondents 142 (47.4%) were single while 103 (34.3%) were married, followed by 48 (16%) were divorced, and only 7 (2.3%) were widow.

**Table 4.1.4;** A higher proportion of the respondents 141 (47%) were civil servant, followed by student & unemployed people 56 (18.6%) and others comprising trading and farming etc.



**Table 4.1.5;** A higher proportion of the respondents 104 (34.6%) had worked for over twenty (>20) years, followed by respondents 78 (26%) who had worked for 16-20 years and 56 (18.7%) had worked for 11-15 years.

**Table 4.1.6;** A higher proportion of the respondents 163 (54.3%) were acquired tertiary education, followed by 79 (26.3%) respondents were secondary education, 37 (12.3%) were primary education and only five respondents, 5 (1.8%) were illiterate.

**Table 4.1.7;** A higher proportion of respondents 124 (41.3%) were Christianity, followed by 95 (31.7%) were Muslim, while 81(27%) were traditionalism.

**Table 4.1.8;** A higher proportion of respondents 162 (54%) were between the numbers of 1-3 years, followed by 75 (25%), 40 (13.3%) were between the numbers of 4-6 years and 7-9 years respectively only 23 (7.7%) were over ten (> 10) years of Ages.

#### **4.2 Shows the Factors Responsible for Women's Low Political Participation in Nigeria Democratic Governance**

A list of socio-economic factors that might influence the women's participation in democratic governance (politics) was incorporated in the questionnaire and the participants were asked to express the extent of their agreement with each of them. Analysis of the participants' answers is summarized in Table 4.2. It can be seen from the reported mean in the table that dearth of financial resources (Poverty) and gender in quality in education are the basic socioeconomic variables, influencing women's political participation. Women do not possess any resources; they are usually co- owners and as such property lies in the hand of men. A little well-read among the women are usually marginalized and quarantined by the society. Consequently, women have been excluded from the political scene or activities by their male counterparts. The awareness campaign and other national values re-orientation activities of Gender and Development Action (GADA), Civil Liberties Organization, National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) Women in Nigeria (WIN) among others, though have helped to upsurge the level of women's political literacy, has not translated to women's significant featuring in the mainstream politics of the states.

#### **5. The Socio-economic Factors Hindering Women Participation in Democratic Governance and Politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

The picture of contemporary reality of women's participation in democratic governance and decision making in Nigeria relies on socio-economic elements (factors). These are:

##### **Dearth of Financial Resources (Poverty):**

The feminization of poverty does appear to the "deadly plague" that affects about 70% of women in Nigeria, inhibiting their decision-making power, in particular, and advancement and development, in general. A recent Central Bank report, based on the analysis of a series of consumer expenditure surveys for poverty in Nigeria during the Covid-19 pandemic, revealed that the female-headed households are over-represented among the poor. Dearth (lack) of access to financial opportunity productive resources have been largely responsible for the growing incidence of poverty among the women in the

society.<sup>6</sup>

**Gender Inequality in Education:**

Education is the basis for the full promotion and improvement of the status of women in the society. The United Nations summits support that education is the basic tool that should be given to women in order to fulfill their role as full members of the society. The nationalists saw education as the instrument to lift the nation out of its primitive morass, to enlighten the masses for democratic participation in national politics, and the nation to participate in international affairs, fewer Nigerian women have access to education than men.<sup>7</sup>

**Restricted Social Participation (Religious)**

A major critical dimension came to mind in the respect that religion has been adjudged as one of the universal factors in the development of individuals and nations. However, misinterpretation of religion doctrines has negatively militated against women's involvement in the power sharing and decision-making process. For instance, in many communities; women, particularly Muslim women in purdah, are unable to actively participate in communal activities. In extreme cases, they may be secluded and unable to come out to engage in productive activities or even to participate in group activities, until they have reached an advanced, post-reproductive age.<sup>8</sup>

**Cultural Heritage:** There are a lot of cultural factors that affected women's participation in democratic governance and politics in Nigeria. For instance, societal values and patriarchy system which recognizes male domination in the society are factors that have relegated women to be subordinate to men and has created women's inferiority complex.<sup>9</sup>

**Political Acrimony:** The results of table 4. 2 show that the acrimonious patrimonial system of political godfathers, thuggery and gangsters have made the political terrain too dangerous for the female gender to tread constitutes great hindrance to women's political participation in Nigeria. In addition, the society's belief that politics is for men and only boyish women get involved, constitute a barrier to women's featuring in the mainstream politics. Women who get involved in it are stigmatized by fellow women and most men as a result would not encourage their wives to be involved in politics. This situation is further worsened by the practice by political parties of holding meetings at odd periods, e.g. nocturnal meetings.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Central Bank of Nigeria, (2020), *Changing structure of the Nigerian economy and implications for development reports*. Lagos Realm Communication. P. 23-87.

<sup>7</sup> Pogoson, A, I, (2013). Women participation in electoral process in Nigerian experience. *The Nigerian electoral journal, special issue*. 5, (10). P. 45-62.

<sup>8</sup> Arowolo, D, and Aluko, F, (2010). Women and political participation in Nigeria. *European journal of social science*. 14, (4), P.11-22.

<sup>9</sup> Ajayi, Kunle, (2010). "Women and Politics". A Paper Presented at the University of Ado – Ekiti, at the Symposium on *therole of women in politics of Nigeria*. P. 1-25.

<sup>10</sup> Ajayi, Kunle, (2010). "Women and Politics". A Paper Presented at the University of Ado – Ekiti, at the Symposium on *therole of women in politics of Nigeria*. P. 1-25.

**Institutional Designs:** The institutional designs which this study found to hinder women's participation in the mainstream politics include the practice of majority electoral system instead of proportional representation; lack of gender electoral quota systems and constitutional provision for equal gender representation in parties' political nominees. All these institutional designs impede women's significant involvement in political activities. Though affirmative action and gender parity have been appreciated in the country, there is hitherto no specific guideline and modality of affirmative actions and no conscious efforts made by the government to entrench such constitutional policies for implementation in Nigeria.<sup>11</sup>

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Despite global campaign for women's participation in Nigeria politics (democratic governance), it is still at dismal level failing to attain the critical mass of thirty (30%) percent's women's representation in the country's legislature. The imperative of democratic transition and consolidation in Nigeria requires that women, who constitute half of the national population, find an eminent position in the mainstream political growth of the nation since the inception of Nigeria's fourth republic, democracy is only achievable on the altar of equal participation of every citizen of the society, males and females alike. It is therefore conclusive that any corrective measure adopted to address the low participation of women in Nigerian politics will only be superficial unless the nation's socioeconomic, cultural and political factors that limit women liberation are decisively addressed.

### **In the light of the forgoing conclusions the study therefore has the following recommendations:**

The Federal Government of Nigeria should endorse the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1995. Nigeria government should be removing the conflicting and discrimination provisions in Nigerian Statutory, Customary and Religious laws that reinforce male supremacy and perpetuate patriarchal system in Nigeria. An Electoral bill explicitly specifying and clarifying guidelines for modalities and implementations of affirmative actions that enhance women's empowerment should be passed into law in the country. For instance, 50% of financial cost of registration as a candidate for political positions and election campaign should be borne by the government. Every national political party should reserve 30% of all elective positions for women. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should ensure that this policy is obeyed and any political party that fails to follow it should be disqualified. Electoral quota system is an effective tool for addressing low women's political representation. There should be constitutional provision for electoral quota system of 50% of the seats in the National Assembly, States' House of Assembly and Local Government Councils in Nigeria reserved for women. Government should engage the support of the mass media and partner with women's movement, NGOs and civil society for

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel, E. G, and Faith, O, O, (2013). Women in governance and sustainable democracy in Nigeria, 1999 – 2012. *Economic and sociology journal*. 6, (1). P. 89-107.

vehement campaign against women subordination, discrimination and stigmatization in the society. Furthermore, civic education of women is useful to destroying inferiority complex and to give aspiring women courage and confidence to compete with men. Women education should target the adult population both in the cities and rural areas. Governments should therefore establish evening and weekend education programs for adult women who as a result of one limitation.