

## **Women and Nigerian Politics: An Appraisal of 2015 General Elections**

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### **Abstract**

The major thrust of this paper is an appraisal of the dynamics of Nigerian women involvement in politics since the birth of the fourth republic with special reference to the 2015 general elections. Major areas of their involvement in politics that this paper intends to interrogate include participation in elective positions (Presidential, Gubernatorial, National and State Houses of Assembly elections), electioneering processes, campaigns and rallies among others. It argues that in spite of the increasing number of Nigerian women in politics, the country's politics is still largely dominated by men. The challenges facing the active participation of Nigerian women in politics such as cultural factor, lack of internal democracy among political parties, gender discrimination, lack of fund and so on are also analysed in the paper. The paper concludes that the involvement of women in Nigerian politics in the Fourth Republic has taken a new dimension especially with reference to 2015 general elections. For the first time in the political history of Nigeria in the republic, a major political party in the country (All Progressives Congress) presented a female candidate as a standard bearer for the gubernatorial election in Taraba State. The paper adopts historical, descriptive and empirical methods in its analysis.

Key words: Women, Politics, Elections, Democracy

## **Introduction**

In historical perspective, the involvement of Nigerian women in politics spanned through three distinct epochs, namely, pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. In the pre-colonial period, there were a number of great women like Queen Amina of Zaria, Iyalode Efunsetan Aniwura of Ibadan, Princess Moremi of Ife, Princess Inikpi of Igala and Emotan of Benin. By their actions, they were able to save their societies from insecurity and the vagaries of war. Thus, they contributed to creating the peaceful environment necessary for the development and growth of their kingdoms. According to Bolanle Awe, these women could rightly be called ‘the saviours of their societies’ (Awe, 1992:2). During the colonial period, women also asserted and expressed themselves politically. Some women who left indelible marks in the political history of Nigeria during this period included Mrs Margaret Ekpo of Calabar, Madam Tinubu of Lagos and Egbaland; Mrs Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of the Abeokuta Women Union (AWU) and Hajiya Sawaba Gambo of Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) (Falola and Fwatshak, 2011:328). Although women enjoyed high political authority in Nigeria in general, over the years, the men had always been dominant in the political structure. Women’s activities were always subordinate and complementary to the existing male dominated structures (Uchendu, 1993:22). Thus, the question of equality of representation in the decision-making and judicial processes did not arise. Even where women were deeply involved in terms of being foundation members of a political party, they were never given equal opportunity in political arrangement but, rather, a complementary role.

Despite the great achievements by some Nigerian women in the pre-colonial period, one would wonder why their political fortunes dwindled during the colonial era. This could be said to be as a result of discrimination against the women which is rooted in the “Victorian Concept” brought about by colonialism which highly encouraged the public invisibility of women who were only to be seen and not really heard (Mba, 1982: 36). This foreign concept portrayed women as mere exhibitions of their husband’s wealth, as appendages, leading to systematic marginalisation of Nigerian women and eventually resulting in minimizing their economic, political and social roles in traditional Nigerian society. The loss of their position in the colonial period left them trailing behind men but they are now gradually coming to relevance in the political space in Nigeria.

In essence, an appraisal of the role of women in governance and decision-making processes must necessarily make recourse to the historical trajectories of the entity called Nigeria. It can be decently argued that the non-involvement of women in public decision-making in contemporary Nigeria has its roots in the colonial experience as mentioned earlier which arguably secluded women and disempowered them, thereby overturning a feat already achieved in the pre-colonial days. To therefore speak of emancipation is to admit that some form of disempowerment, deprivation, seclusion and marginalization has been dominantly experienced (Oni, 2014:100). For instance, women founded cities, led migrations and even conquered kingdoms (Afolabi, 2013:38). In the organisation of various traditional governments in the pre-colonial era, women held powerful positions and thus have voice in the political life of their societies. In the Yoruba system of government for instance, the Iyalode, a title of the leader of women groups, was a member of the council of state down to 1914 (Afolabi, 2013:40). In the same vein, the period was an era when women participation in governance especially in public realm contributed immensely to societal growth and development. The role of women in political organisation as Afolabi (2013) further noted may be defined in terms of involvement, direct or indirect in the activities of government. Women were thus seen as instrument of social cohesion and mobilization in the pre-colonial days. Observably, pre-colonial governments or administrations encouraged women politically by deliberately creating positions to be held by women so that they could be involved in the life of the society.

With the birth of the Fourth Republic in 1999, women involvement in politics has taken several dimensions, ranging from being foundation members of political parties to vying for elective positions both at executive and legislative levels. It is against this background that this paper interrogates women and Nigerian politics in the Fourth Republic with major emphasis on 2015 general elections. This paper is divided into six parts.

### **Historicising Women Participation in Nigerian Politics, 1960-1993: An Overview**

During the early colonial period, the political administration of most Nigerian communities was dominated by men. The British made use of male traditional rulers as Sole Native Authorities. According to Mba, women under colonialism felt victimised and deprived. This was thus, the basis of women's political actions which culminated in various protest movements which were prevalent especially in Southern Nigeria during the time (Ikpe, 1997:257).

Thus, the most important contribution of Nigerian women to the political development of the Nigerian nation was largely confined to constant protests against colonial policies which were unfavourable to their well being. From 1918 till end of the colonial rule, there were protests against different colonial ordinances like the Native Revenue Ordinance. Perhaps the most widespread and significant of these protests was the Aba Riots of 1929 (Mba, 1982:21). These riots engulfed the whole of Eastern Nigeria. Of note in these agitation movements were the organising abilities of the women in handling public and delicate matters. The capacity to plan and execute effectively, taking government by storm, emphasised the leadership, the dexterity, determination and the power of women's collective action. Thus, by their agitation, women contributed greatly to the nationalist movements, and the eventual rise of the Nigerian nation.

Women's involvement in the political development during colonial period Nigeria was not only political agitations but also to formation of modern pressure groups and political parties (Uchendu, 1993:61). In 1901, Lady Obasa formed the Lagos Women's League as a pressure group for better sanitary conditions and women education. In keeping with the political development of the 1940s, Lady Abayomi established the Women's Party in 1944. Although the party did not have a large following, it agitated for welfare issues and the equality of sexes. Likewise the Abeokuta Ladies Club founded by Mrs Ransome Kuti metamorphosed into the Abeokuta Women's Union in 1946. In 1949, the scope of this party was extended and its name was changed to the Nigerian Women's Union (Mba, 1982:25-26). Although these women organisations did not grow into mass parties, they helped to bring women's and welfare matters in an organised manner to the attention of the colonial government and the public. They thus sensitised the enlightened public about the problems of women, suggested solutions and agitated for their implementation.

Apart from establishing their own parties, women were involved in the establishment and growth of the political parties which dominated Nigerian politics from 1951 till independence (Ikpe, 1993:259). Through the women's wings of the parties women could mobilise grassroots women for their parties. However, only very few women were privileged to be admitted into the upper echelons of the parties. Many of such women included the wives of the leaders of the parties. However, a few women were able to distinguish themselves. One of such women was Margaret Ekpo of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroun, (NCNC). She was a veteran politician who won election on her own merit into the Eastern House of Assembly in 1953/1954 and attended Constitutional Conferences. In the

House, she continuously raised issues relating to women's welfare, their economic status and social welfare in general. Other women politicians of this era included Lady Abayomi, Mrs Kuti, Miss Young and Mrs Femi-Pearse (Mba, 1982:134-155). In Northern Nigeria, women did not participate so directly in party politics, they were important in rallying grassroots women for voting purposes. A good example was Hajia Gambo Sawaba of the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU). Despite their immense contributions, women party functionaries were treated only as adjuncts and their activities was largely confined to the women's wing. In other words, they were not adequately rewarded in terms of elective and appointive positions. They remained women-voter catchers for their parties.

After independence, mass political action by women dwindled. This development was caused by the acrimonious politics of the post-independence era, the bitter rivalries of the ethnic-based and personality dominated political parties and the paternalistic nature of their organisation. They became detrimental to women's participation. In fact, these developments split the women into opposing camps so that mass action became impossible (Ikpe, 1997:262). For example, Mrs Esan resigned from the Action Group (AG) in 1964 in protest against the party's alliance with the National Council of Nigerian and Cameroons; she continued to serve in the Senate and supported the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) government set up by S. L. Akintola. However, some women continued to play important role in the women's wing of the major political parties and a few won elections to the different Houses. Mrs Bernice Kerry with Wuraola Esan in the Federal Parliament while Mrs. Margaret Ekpo and Mrs Janet Muokelu were in the Eastern Nigerian House of Assembly but there was no female Minister during the time (Mba, 1982. 189). This situation was aggravated by the imposition of military rule. Despite the political setback experienced at national and state levels, women's political relevance increased at community levels where women were organised and mobilised for community development. In this way, countless women organisations contributed to the building and running of community schools, maternal homes and hospitals, motherless babies' homes, roads and markets (Ikpe, 1993:260).

With the birth of the Second Republic (1979-1983) after sixteen years of military intervention, Nigeria returned to democratic rule. The election that produced President Alhaji Shehu Shagari was fraught with manipulations and falsification of ballot reports. The president himself was inept and his presidency was defined by massive corruption and political intrigues (Akinola, 2009). The military seized upon these faults to depose the government in December, 1983 (Akinni and Adesote, 2014:101). The women were also

involved in the politics of the day. Most of them were members of National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). Only 4 out of 475 candidates who contested for Senate seats were women and none was successful. Only two women were elected to the Federal House of Representatives and five women made it to the State Houses (Mba, 1982:303). With this few seats won, the women were poorly represented in the ruling bodies of all the parties. They were once again pushed to the women's wing of the political parties to continue to act as voter-catchers. However, women who participated actively in the civilian politics of 1979 were according to Attoe (2002), such women as Mrs J. C. Eze and Mrs V. O. Nnaji and Mrs A. Babatope were part of the women in the government at the time. Thus, once again, women did not have adequate representation and could not influence matters in their favour. The political lethargy which had gripped women during the long years of military rule prevented the effective development of organised women participation. With the demise of that inglorious Republic in 1983, women once again retreated to the backwaters of national politics (Ikpe, 1997:263-264).

The military regime of General Babangida, however, did a lot to foster the cause of the Nigerian women and enhance the image of the Nigerian womanhood. For instance, for the first time, a female Vice Chancellor, in the person of Grace Alele Williams of Benin was appointed. Women ambassadors were appointed and all Military Governors were directed to appoint at least one woman into their cabinets. The cause of women was further enhanced with the inauguration in 1987 of the Better Life Programme for Rural Women by Mrs Maryam Babangida (Ikpe, 1997:264). For many women, Mrs Babangida provided an example of how well placed women could use their positions to the benefits of their fellow women. However, the aims of alleviating poverty and increasing the economic power of women were not achieved during this period. The program also ignored the articulate members of the Nigerian womanhood whose economic and political clout could help to ameliorate the plight of women in Nigeria.

Military rule in Nigeria, continued up till 1992/1993 when the process of transition programme was initiated by General Ibrahim Babangida. The annulment of which the June 12, 1993 presidential election was adjudged the fairest and freest election, locally and internationally, since independence by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida, made the transition programme to be unsuccessful. This development was followed by an Interim National Government (ING), headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan. The ING which was put in place in August 1993 was due to intense pressure mounted by the people of the South-Western

Nigeria following annulment of the June 12 presidential election (an election won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola who hails from the South West) as a means of pacifying them. The new government did not last for more than three months before it later was overthrown through a bloodless coup by late General Sanni Abacha (Akinbi and Adesote, 2014:103).

### **Women and Nigerian Politics in the Fourth Republic, 1999-2014**

The Fourth Republic began on May 29, 1999 following successful transition programme initiated by the former Head of State of Nigeria, Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar. The process that led to the birth of the Republic began in 1998 after the controversial death of the then Nigerian military dictator, Gen. Sanni Abacha. Gen. Abacha initially initiated a transition program that would have translated him from a military dictator to a civilian president. This was not realized due to his unexpected death on June 8, 1998 (Akinbi and Adesote, 2014:103). Following his death, General Abdulsalam Abubakar became the new Head of State. He immediately announced that he would hand over power to a democratically elected president on May 29, 1999. As a follow up to the announcement, General Abdulsalam dissolved the existing five political parties registered by the Abacha regime. He voided all the elections that were conducted, and set up another electoral body known as Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) (Akinbi and Adesote, 2014:101). The ban on political parties was lifted, and political prisoners were released from detention facilities. The constitution was modelled after that of the ill-fated Second Republic which saw the Westminster system of government jettisoned for an American Presidential system. The electoral body was set up initially to grant provisional registration to nine political parties, with the condition that only those that had more than 10% of the votes in at least 24 out of the 36 states of the Federation in the local government elections would qualify to contest the subsequent State and Federal elections (Akinbi and Adesote, 2014:104). Eventually, the only three political parties that made the cut and were registered are People's Democratic Party (PDP), All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) and Alliance for Democracy (AD). Elections were set for April 1999. In the widely monitored 1999 elections, former military ruler General Olusegun Obasanjo was elected on the platform of PDP. On 29 May 1999, Olusegun Obasanjo was sworn in as President and Commander in Chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Akinbi and Adesote, 2014:104).

Since the inception of the current democratic dispensation in 1999, concerted efforts have been made by women's groups, women advocates and activists, civil society

organisations, Nigerian government and international agencies and donor communities to increase women's participation in both political and public life. Although there is no constitutional provision for the office of the First Lady, Nigeria has paraded several First Ladies in the Fourth Republic and many amongst them played roles that made them prominent. However, statistics revealed very low, disproportionate representation of women in governance. This situation falls well below the recommended 30% of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 and 35% recommendation of National Policy on Women adopted in July 2000 (Odi, 2012:3.) Although the Nigerian democracy since 1999 provided opportunity for women's participation in politics, the reality is that the place of women in elective and appointive position with the sixteen years of democratic rule was still low. But, it was better than during the colonial and second republic. This very low representation of women in governance can be attributed to several factors which will be interrogated later in this paper. There is no doubt that Nigerian women participated virtually in all electoral process in the country since 1999.

### **Women and Nigerian Politics: An Appraisal of 2015 General Elections**

This section interrogates the extent of women involvement in the 2015 general elections. Areas of their participation include registration, voting, campaigns, contest and so on. It argues that in spite of the increasing number of Nigerian women in politics, the country's politics is still largely dominated by men. The challenges facing the active participation of Nigerian women in politics such as cultural factor, lack of internal democracy among political parties, gender discrimination, and lack of fund and so on are also analysed in descriptive and analytical manner.

### **The 2015 General Elections**

Elections allow democratic nations a chance to celebrate the rebirth of values of popular representation of the interest of the people. Nigerians have, through the recent 2015 General Elections, celebrated this important aspect of democracy. More importantly, the loss of an election by an incumbent Nigerian President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan to an opposition candidate and the acceptance of the unprecedented situation signify the coming of age of an ideal democracy (The Guardian April 2, 2015:19). The development showed that democracy has actually been consolidated in the country. Fundamentally, our concern here is how this process has advanced the political status of women as well as their role in the unfolding scenario.

The outcome of the 2015 General Elections has been argued to be the most expensive in African History (The Guardian April 14, 2015:20). Meanwhile, it has not indicated a marked departure from the entrenched 'tradition' of circumscribing women's role in the political engineering process of even the 'benefits' accruing to them for their efforts. Gender cleavages still dictates who wins and who losses election. However, modest progress especially within the more conservative cultural and religious enclaves is exploding myths about the incongruity between politics and gender (Ogunsola, 1993:77). As these women are tried and proven, the trust of the public and the corollary legitimacy of gender representation grow. There are grounds to argue that the representation of women is self-producing and self-sustaining, manifesting as both a catalyst and a consequence of their inclusion. A close examination of the electioneering processes and the voting pattern of the 2015 general elections will assist in validating this position.

### **Electioneering Processes**

Electioneering process is made up of the entire or series of activities engaged in by the persons who have agreed to submit themselves to the elections, their political parties, groups, communities, political associations, friends, families and others in order to influence the anticipated preference of the electorate or choosers positively. Simply put, electioneering encompasses all the activities that ginger electorates to support candidates in elections (Akinwalere, 2012:10).

The electioneering process in Nigeria starts with registration of voters in which Nigerian women participated actively (INEC, 2014). This was accompanied by awareness programs conducted by different kinds of agencies, especially on the importance of voters' registration. In a nutshell, a lot of agencies went all out to facilitate mass enlightenment and multi-media campaigns on voter education and promote citizen awareness in order to increase voter turnout during the election and thereby promote electoral and governance accountability, even beyond the elections. The role of the Nigerian Police and other Security Agencies cannot be underestimated here. It was categorically stated during the conference organised on the 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2015 by the Nigerian Police that the success or failure of any election depends on the stakeholders like INEC, political parties, election observers, media, the Nigerian Police and other security agencies performing their duties effectively and efficiently as expected (The New Dawn, April 10, 2015).

Organisations like the International Republican Institute (IRI), CEDPA and United Nations (UN) worked with women in major states and cities to spread the awareness of the need for women's leadership and to sharpen skills. Through strategic planning and advocacy workshops, participants expand their political education skills and are encouraged to individually speak out. The Democratic Governance for development project, implemented by United Nations Development Project (UNDP) in partnership with the Nigerian Government trained over 2,043 female politicians and candidates in preparation for electoral processes at both national and state levels. Focused programmes, like those organized by the IRI and UNDP, truly make an impact on female political engagement (UNDP, 2014).

Towards this, the Nigerian Women Trust Fund supported the 'Preparation towards the 2015 General Election: Enhancing citizen participation through Civil Society Organisations' at a Conference in Abuja, Nigeria on 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2014. The meeting is one of the many fora for the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to actively engage with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) enroute to a fairer 2015 election process (Onyekwelu, 2014:1). Also, the Trust Fund whose multimedia campaign focuses on the benefits of increased women's political participation; the women's political education session conducted by the non-partisan Women in Politics Forum to increase women's chances to run successful campaigns for office. It should be noted that INEC introduced an easily accessible means of continuous voter registration via email and SMS, and called on the help of CSO's to educate the voters on its use. The women took advantage of this and registered enmasse towards the 2015 general elections to make up the total number of 68,833,476 registered voters in the country, both male and female (INEC, 2014).

The Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) of Rivers State, Dame Gesila O. Khan observed in a paper on how INEC supports women participation in the 2015 Elections, the poor participation of women in politics vis-à-vis their numerical strength and relevance in governance has propelled the commission to support them both as voters and candidates. She opined that "Available statistics show that over 49% of the Nigerian population are women, yet only 7% are involved in governance", adding that Nigeria has a huge resource base of women whose contributions are currently not being enjoyed". Other reasons she advanced for supporting women include their equal constitutional rights to political participation as men, increasing their number in governance to fulfil Nigeria's local and international commitments for gender parity among others (INEC Admin, 2015).

Mrs Dame Judith Amaechi, the wife of the governor of Rivers state also encouraged the youths to shun violence as 2015 general elections as it gather momentous, that the youths must intensify their efforts to educate and re-orient themselves against violence and from all forms of victimisations. With this, the use of youths for violence was minimised during the 2015 general elections (Elendu Report, Thursday 12, 2015). A lot of women leaders and advocates were involved in the electioneering process of the 2015 general elections.

### **Campaigns and Rallies**

When the 2015 general elections were approaching, candidates from various political parties launched their campaigns in full swing. The Nigerian women participated actively in the 2015 general elections campaigns and rallies. The women came all out to support the candidates of their choice to support them in campaigns and rallies. Dame Patience Jonathan and Hajia Aishat Buhari campaigned rigorously for their spouses. Dame Patience Jonathan was seen severally at campaigns for the return of her husband while Hajiya Aisha Buhari appeared for the first time at a campaign rally on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January, 2015 at the M.K.O Abiola Stadium, Abeokuta, Ogun State. She engaged in campaigns that further confirmed her support for her husband. She was involved in mobilising women to vote for her husband and engaged the crowd at rallies on issues and promises by her husband (The News Magazine, 2015.13). She also demonstrated her passion for the development of Nigerian women at a campaign rally in Edo State, where she assured women that her husband would initiate policies that would guarantee their living standard.

Also, the Nasarawa State governor's wife, Hajiya Salamatu Al-Makura called on the women in the country to see the postponement of election by six weeks as opportunity to go and collect their Permanent Voters Card (PVC) when she played host to some women groups that paid her a courtesy visit in her office in Lafia (News Agency of Nigeria, Feb. 19, 2015).

In buttressing the fact that women participated actively in the campaign rallies of 2015 general elections, women and youths numbering over 5,000 staged a mega rally in support of APC presidential flag bearer, Gen. Muhammadu Buhari and his running mate, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo. The rally took place simultaneously in Afikpo Local Government area and Abakaliki, the state capital. They marched through Ebonyi APC campaign headquarters along old Enugu road through major streets in the two cities, chanting songs in support of the APC standard bearers (Osun Defender, 2015). All these revealed the level of women

involvement in the 2015 general elections. They also featured in the cultural events and entertainment, mobilisation, catering and event managements as well as in clerical duties.

Furthermore, in Aisha Buhari's efforts in mobilising women and youths to support and vote for her husband during the campaign period, she reiterated her gratitude to the efforts of the women during the 2015 general elections that brought her husband to power. In her speech during the 'Appreciation Dinner' organised recently at the government house, Abuja for women and youths on the success of the campaigns to team work of the women and youths that helped vote her husband into office. With her agenda on 'focusing on women issues' the wife of the president hoped to see more women in the legislature, from the local level, while she also observed the decline of women in the legislature as opined in the body of this paper, Aisha Buhari hopes to help reverse the situation and believed that empowerment from the ward level would better affect ordinary women on the streets. She also quoted people saying that her husband earned up to 'four million votes' as a result of her campaigns (The News Magazine, 2015.16). This indicates to a large extent the importance of the role of women during campaigns and rallies for their husbands. On the other hand, it has also been said in some quarters that the role of Dame Patience Jonathan during the 2015 general election campaigns contributed to her husband's defeat at the polls. However, with high level of participation of women in the electoral processes, the following tables below however indicate the level of representation of women in the 2015 elections in Nigeria.

## **Women Participation in Elective Positions**

### **The Presidential**

Professor Oluremi Sonaya, the first woman to ever qualify as a presidential candidate in Nigeria came on board in the 2015 general elections. She was involved in a primary with three other aspirants and emerged as the party's nominee as the presidential candidate of the party. The presidential result revealed that women participation can actually influence the politics of the country. The only female candidate polled some votes in all the states of the country. The result showed some reasonable votes where male candidates were unable to get as much. For example, in Nasarawa State where Citizens Popular Party (CPP) candidate polled four votes, she polled forty eight votes. Also, the total number of votes she secured surpasses that of HOPE Democratic Party and United Democratic Party (UDP) parties during the election. While the total number of votes for HOPE was 7,393 and UDP was 9,147 votes, KOWA party had 12,524 votes (The Punch, April 1, 2015).

With this development, experts and gender activists have continuously advocated the active participation of women in governance for the good of society. The result of the just concluded 2015 general elections in the country has however, not shown improved women representation in elective positions in the country. It should be noted that out of the fourteen candidates that contested for the seat of the president, the only woman amongst the contenders came out in the twelfth position. Just as men have always dominated the National Assembly, the 2015 election result does not present a different picture in the number of women who will represent their constituencies in the next four years. However, many Nigerians saw in the audacious candidacy the possibility of real change and a clear departure from what the country experienced so far as a nation.

### **The Gubernatorial**

The gubernatorial candidate of the All Progressive Congress, APC in Taraba state Aisha Jumai Al-Hassan would have made history in the last gubernatorial election in the state as the first woman to scale the hurdles of electioneering campaign and break the jinx that has befuddled Nigerian women over the years from emerging successful at the polls as governors, but for the outcome of the election which was not in her favour in the gubernatorial election.

‘Mama Taraba’ as she was fondly called, almost made it but then, the near success syndrome that has been the lot of many Nigerian women in politics cut short her joy. Her expectations were high that she would emerge successful considering the direction of some results earlier reeled out by INEC. But suddenly, the result of the election was declared inconclusive and then, a re-run that finally dashed her hope when the PDP candidate was declared winner.

### **The Legislative**

**Table 1. Senate**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total No of Seats and Percentages</b>				
	<b>No of Seats</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>%</b>
1999	109	106	97.2	3	1.8
2003	109	105	96.3	4	3.7
2007	109	100	91.7	9	8.3
2011	109	102	93.6	7	6.4
2015	109	101	92.7	8	7.3

Source: The Nigerian CEDAW NGO Coalition Shadow Report (2008), New York, United Nations Committee on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. Adapted from Ojo, John Sunday (2013)

In all, eight women made it to the 109 members' senate as opposed to the seven elected in 2011. Three of the eight women senators are of the All Progressive Congress (APC) while the rest five are from the People Democratic Party (PDP). The 2015 general elections was able to add one female to the seven in the 2011Senate. This is still far from what is expected of a balanced assembly

**Table 2. House of Representatives**

Year	Total No of Seats and Percentages				
	No of Seats	Men	%	Women	%
1999	360	347	96.4	13	3.6
2003	339	318	94.2	21	5.8
2007	360	333	92.5	27	7.5
2011	360	335	93.1	25	6.9
2015	360	346	96.1	14	3.9

Source: The Nigerian CEDAW NGO Coalition Shadow Report (2008), New York, United Nations Committee on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. Adapted from Ojo, John Sunday (2013)

The table above indicate a drop from the 2011 general elections. There was a steady increase in women representation in the House of Representatives since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999. But during the 2015 general elections, the percentage of women representation dropped from 25% to 14%. This is not a good development. However, there is this hope that the new government will compensate the women in the appointive position like the President Jonathan administration did for the women folk.

**Table 3. State Houses of Assembly**

Year	Total No of Seats and Percentages				
	No of Seats	Men	%	Women	%
1999	978	966	98.8	12	1.2
2003	951	912	96	39	4.0
2007	900	843	94.2	57	5.8
2011	900	832	93.1	68	6.9
2015	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: The Nigerian CEDAW NGO Coalition Shadow Report (2008), New York, United Nations Committee on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. Adapted from Ojo, John Sunday (2013)

NA – Not Available

Tables 3 reveal that in 1999 House of Assembly elections, women constitute 1.2% while the men folk comprise 98.8%; in 2003, women were 4% while men constitute 96%. In 2007 women were 5.8% while men were 94.2%. With little increase, women were 5.8% in 2011 while men were 93.1%. The 2015 general elections reveal that the Senate has 7.3% of women

and 92.7% of men representation. There is also a little increase during the 2015 general election from 5.8% in 2011 to 7.3% in 2015. It should be noted that there is general low representation of women during the elections compared to the level of women participation in the elections. This has been the pattern which needs to be addressed in the country.

### **Deputy Governorship Position**

The gubernatorial elections produced four women deputy governors. They are Oluranti Adebule (Lagos State), Mrs Yetunde Onanuga (Ogun State), Ipalibo Banigo (Rivers State) and Cecilia Ezeilo (Enugu State). It is disheartening to observe that only few women emerged winners in the various positions they contested for both at the party primaries and in the general elections. Despite improved political consciousness of women and the various objectives of the National Gender Policy, it is disappointing that women still occupy less than eight percent of elective positions at all levels of governance in the country. The “domino theory” of patriarchy and masculinity which predominantly characterised the Nigerian society is still a dominant force that controls the entire polity (Oke, 2013:67). Men still exclusively dominate Nigeria’s political landscape and this reflects in the gap in the number of seats won in general elections from 1999 till date on the basis of gender as captured by the tables above. Be that as it may, women have benefitted more in selective or appointive positions since 1999 and in fact, in some instances, they have been compensated with 35% inclusion in all appointive positions (Oke, 2013:67). Women have occupied many sensitive appointive positions which have expectedly improved their voices in public affairs. For example, Dr Okonjo Iweala (who served as Minister of Finance and coordinating minister for the Nigerian economy), no doubt, has played significant role in not only the political economy of Nigeria, she has also set a pace at the international scene.

In a nutshell, the empirical evidences as given above depicts the potency or otherwise of the contribution of women in the formation and restructuring of the Nigerian economy and politics in general. It then means that women can play active roles in shaping the direction of Nigerian politics even far beyond the imaginations of the male folk. By any standard, however, women participate in politics as voters, party supporters and usually attend political rallies in large number. Some even run for top political offices (the example of Sarah Jibril and Professor Oluremi Sonaya of the KOWA Party who contested for the office of President with Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari respectively and Hon. Mulikat who unsuccessfully (albeit robustly) vied for the seat of Speaker, House of representative is apt in

this direction). The 2006 census puts Nigerian women at about half the population of the entire country (Channels TV, 2012 August 2). Despite this numerical advantage and the massive participation in voting, less than 20% of political offices are held by women. For all intents and purposes, it appears that the Nigerian situations seem to defy the political theory that political power derives from political participation because women participate fully in elections in Nigeria but without full representation (Jibrin and Salihu, 2004:)

Nigerian women have about the lowest representation of 5.9% in the national legislature when compared to most other African countries. For example, Uganda has 34.6%, South Africa (43.2%), Ethiopia (27.7%), Cameroun (20%), Niger (12.3%) and DR Congo (8.0%) (Daily Times, May 18, 2012). For Nigeria women, particularly in areas of political representation in governance the percentage is 7%, the lowest in the world (Vanguard Newspaper, January 21, 2013). Women representation in Nigeria politics has, over the years, been less than encouraging. This poses a challenge and narrows the chances of getting more women in decision-making structures. Women have actually proved their strength and competence in the society in all spheres even in male dominated professions but women involvement in public decision making processes in the emergent Fourth Republic in Nigeria has been characterized by low representation. Instructively, women have particularly demanded the implementation of affirmative actions towards the integration of at least 35% of women in all elective positions and in fulfilment of United Nations agenda for gender mainstreaming (Oni, 2014:107). Women political empowerment and development as enshrined in Nigeria's National Gender Policy should be adopted. It is useful to mention that globally, women representation has increased from 13% to 18% (Igbuzor, 2014:77). But it is worrisome to note that while increase in Africa is phenomenon from 10% to 17%, the growth rate in Nigeria remains stunted and even declining. The clamour for the attainment of the 35% affirmative action for women political integration has remained a far cry from what is obtainable in other continents. Igbuzor, 2014 attempted a comparative assessment thus:

*Burundi has 30% quota for women representation in the constitution while there is 50% local representation in South Africa Local Government. African National Congress (ANC) has 30% women representation enshrined in the party's constitution.*

A comparative study of election results from 1999-2015 reveals vividly that elective positions still elude women despite huge investments in mobilization, advocacy, lobbying and many others. However, it is impressive to observe that women public consciousness has

improved significantly in the Fourth Republic. More women have put themselves forward in virtually every position to be contested for in the current political dispensation unlike the situation previously. Women political consciousness was particularly fascinating and impressive in the 2015 general elections. But this has not translated to meaningful inclusion in the political process as expected. As a result, it would be necessary to look into the challenges facing the involvement of women in the Nigerian politics and which has also affected their representation in the 2015 general elections.

### **The challenges facing the Nigerian Women in Politics**

Over the years, Nigerian women have continued to record very poor performances in elective political offices. This is largely due to the sentimental attachment on feminine gender. Although they have been playing crucial role in political life of the country, this has not yielded results in terms of their performances when it comes to elective offices. The following are some of the challenges considered to be affecting the women in elective positions:

#### **Cultural and Religious Factors**

Culture and religion are strong factors inhibiting women involvement in politics in Nigeria. The socio-political and religious values constrained women to be fully involved in political participation, especially in the northern Nigeria where Purdah System is more pronounced. Even in other climes there are also inhibiting socio-cultural practices like polygamy where the husband in Yorubaland will have a favourite among his wives who represents him in some occasions.

#### **Gender Imbalance**

Nigeria as a Federation operates the Federal Character Principle which is the attempt to eschew group imbalance in public institutions and affairs. The definition of that “group” does not include gender in the conception and implementation of the principle. Understandably, there are legal provisions which tend to guarantee the equality of all individual and groups including women. But there is no legally backed affirmative action to promote gender balance. This has been fostering discrimination against women in employment in government and the private sectors. This may be as a result of patriarchy, which sees the man as the breadwinner and head of the family and must, therefore, be given preference over women in employment (Jegade, 1994: 101). The military is a good example where women were

excluded in the combatant corps thereby automatically excluding them in high-powered political decision-making in the organisation.

### **Lack of Internal Democracy**

Political parties in Nigeria are fond of selecting a consensus candidate as flag bearers of the party during the elections. Democracy is not usually allowed to play its full part in elective positions. In a situation whereby a candidate is highly favoured, the political leaders will not allow contest to have its full sway. Within a period of time, they would have declared a consensus candidate to the disappointment of other candidates who are willing and even in some cases more qualified for the position.

### **Lack of Funds**

Finance is a major factor for the survival of every organisation. It is the bedrock upon which successful institution rests. First, to understand the financial problem of women in Nigerian politics, we have to fathom the type of politics in Nigeria. Politics in Nigerian parlance could be understood within the framework of monetization. Any political contestant must have prepared to acquire the entire necessary wherewithal to make him or her successful in the electoral contest. The cost of running electoral contestation in Nigeria is too exorbitant for women to bear (this includes; party nomination form which runs into millions of naira, election campaigns, gifts to god fathers, people mobilization and money for political party leaders, etc). This financial burden discourages women to run in democratic contests.

### **Women Issues**

Women are said to be their own worst enemies. An article by Women in Higher Education pointed out that relationships are central to women's lives and they expect their relationships to be on a level playing field, and that when something – anything affects this balance, such as promotion, it raises feelings of insecurity. The article underscores the reasons why on entering a gathering, women quickly, but silently, do an assessment and judge themselves on looks, age and sex appeal. (Punch 4: 2015). Though women hate to admit it, they still judge others on these. When women find themselves in a marginalised position within the family, they may react by trying to be extremely good, or go on the offensive to prove they are smarter and better than other women. This implies that women are more likely to judge their abilities against those of other female colleagues than males. Generally, jealousy is usually the problem but it has not been subjected to any serious research. It's just a feeling, and

women themselves do confess to it. This is manifested in the “pull her down-syndrome” where women condemn female political aspirants by calling them names, assassinate their character and engage in smear campaigns thereby making women enemies of one another. Casual observation will support that women while in authority may be a little harsh over their female counterparts, and men are not spared sometimes. This also is a major challenge to women voting for their counterparts in politics and this could have been to a large extent a factor responsible for low women support for Oluremi Sonaya of KOWA Party as a presidential candidate in the 2015 general elections.

### **Violent Nature of Nigerian Politics**

The challenge of Violence in Nigerian politics, which has been part and parcel of Nigerian democracy pose an obstacle to women’s interest in party politics. During the periods of campaigns, the political atmosphere is usually characterised by waves of assassinations, thuggery, murders, arson, looting and kidnappings. The incidence of Mrs Emily Olufunke Omope-Aborishade also known as ‘Ms Thatcher’ who was bathed with acid in Ekiti State in 2002 for her unwavering determination in the state politics was a case in point. The physical battles which often accompany electoral contests in Nigeria need to be addressed and this can be spearheaded by civil society organisations.

### **Women Education**

The problem of women education generally starts with lack of access to education like men. Once the girl child is withdrawn untimely from school for socio-economic reasons, the boy continues to go further. This deprived most Nigerian women from formal education. Meanwhile, education is a necessary pre-requisite for securing high-powered jobs in the public and private sectors. Without this important ‘ingredient’, women are unable to put in their best towards personal and national development. This again is a shortcoming in women participation in politics generally.

In sum, it can be said that women representation at all levels of governance in Nigeria is highly disproportionate to their numerical strength. Thus, while the aforementioned factors might have inhibited the significant participation of women in politics, they do not provide all the explanatory variables. Our perception of the nature of the role of women in the society is prejudiced against women. Redefining that perception in manner favourable to active women

participation, therefore is a significant step to addressing the problem of gender imbalance in Nigeria.

However, in order to succeed, women must cooperate among themselves to win in a man's world like Nigeria and refused to be used to pull down or limit their fellow women in whatever field of endeavour. They must agree to work together. Women have not been using their numerical strength to their advantage. It is believed that if all women will determine to give their votes to women aspirants, the chances will be quite high for women aspirants. But instead, you see men marginalising women in political party leadership with most parties' hierarchy dominated by men. This could be linked to the comparably poor financial status of women to fund or support party activities in the country.

### **Conclusion**

The above discourse has thoroughly examined the historical trajectory of women involvement in Nigerian politics. The paper argues that the involvement of women in Nigerian politics over the years has undergone some major transformation, especially with the return to democratic rule in 1999. For example, for the first time in the political history of women active participation in Nigerian democracy, one of the fourteen registered political parties in the 2015 presidential election (KOWA Party), presented a female as its candidate. Her emergence as a candidate for the party followed due process of internal democracy. In fact, the primary election which led to her emergence was keenly contested between her and other three contestants who were male. Although she did not emerge as the winner of the presidential election, she came twelveth, defeating other two political parties, (HOPE and UDP) which had male as their candidates. This development was a major change in the Nigerian democracy.

Importantly, although some female contested for governorship primaries in some political parties, they had not emerged as standard bearer for the party since the birth of the Fourth Republic in 1999 except during the 2015 general elections. Also, for the first time, a major political party, now known as the ruling party in the country, All Progressive Congress, (APC) presented a female candidate as the governorship aspirant of Taraba State. Although she equally lost the election, this is a major development in the Nigerian democracy. Aside the fact that over the years, women had been playing significant role in the Nigerian politics, a critical appraisal of the 2015 experience especially with respect to representation in elective

positions in the executive arm of government showed that their political involvement was quite impressive. In spite of this development, the paper submits that they need to be given more space in the Nigerian politics.

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