

## **WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIAN POLITICS FROM 1999 TO 2015**

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### **Abstract**

Politics is the process by which individuals as members of a group share ideas and participate in activities of acquiring and wielding power. Politics in Nigeria in the past eight years have shown the dwindling fortunes of women. The objective of the paper is to critically analyze the social structures and institutional barriers to effective women participation and representation in politics and governance. The methodology is critical ethnography which relied on official statistics, historical sources, mass media and participant observation for data collection. In conclusion, it finds that the conundrum of women exclusion is that with their numerical advantage and higher voting strength women occupy about 20% of elective political offices in Nigeria hence their invisibilization.

**Keywords:** discrimination; women political participation; invisibilization; exclusion; gender structure approach.

### **Introduction**

The agitations for the rights of women have continued to echo globally since the United Nations declaration of 1975 as the International Women's Year. Similarly, issues concerning women have dominated public discourse in almost all facets of life. World conferences and conventions on the rights of women have evolved various strategies and institutional frameworks to address discrimination against women. More than ever before, there is a continuous global effort and commitment to redress imbalance especially in politics. Generally, these measures have only recorded marginal success except in some Nordic countries where meaningful progress has been achieved.

For a clearer understanding of the problem, it is pertinent to take cognizance of these basic facts: that Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nations charter on Human Rights; ratified the articles of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); signed the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol); adopted the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action and other global and international agreements on the rights of women (National Gender Policy, 2006). However, to say that Nigerian women are invisibilized in terms of political structures and processes in governance is to state the obvious. This is a trend in the last two general elections that has seen the reduction in the number of women in elective positions. An overarching issue is that discrimination against women is an institutionally entrenched form of sexism.

In this wise, the paper critically analyzes the social structures and institutional barriers to effective women participation and representation in politics and governance. The article portrays the negative devotion to objective participation and involvement of women in politics. It also assessed the extent of the progress (if any) in ensuring women's optimal participation and representation in contemporary Nigerian politics. Specifically, women's involvement, participation and representation in Nigerian politics were appraised under the period 1999 to 2015. The import of women's political participation was analyzed for a better

understanding of their role in politics and governance. Constraints to women representation in Nigerian politics were also reviewed with reference to the ideological, socio-cultural, political, behavioural, legal and economic bases of women's invisibilization in politics.

With a female population of 80.2 million out of 162.5 million people (Gender Report 2012:20), women's political participation in governance and decision making is still very low in relation to their numerical strength. However, marginal progress has been made since Nigeria's political independence in 1960. At independence, there was no woman appointed into the cabinet. The first republic (1966) produced two female senators nominated by their party and not elected. There was no female elected in the 1979 general elections while in the 1983 general elections only one female candidate was elected into the 91 member senate (Nwaorgu; 1988 & Alapiki; 2010). Women's level of involvement in politics and governance is abysmally low and proportionally negligible. Hence, the nation has neither produced an elected female president, vice-president nor senate president. Gender segregation was a predominant feature of the colonial government in Nigeria. British colonial government paid no attention to the role of women in the decision-making process as evidenced in the appointments to key positions and policies in Nigeria. Though the colonial government alienated women from governance yet, some Nigerian women have made their marks in the nation's political history since independence. Nigerian women have become more resolute in ensuring greater political inclusion, participation and representation.

It is pertinent to note that in 2006, the deputy governor of Anambra state; Mrs. Virgie Etiaba had a brief spell (six months) in office as governor following the impeachment of the governor; Mr. Peter Obi. By this feat, Mrs. Virgie Etiaba became the first woman governor in the political history of Nigeria. The National Gender Policy of 35% affirmative action target for women in public offices so far only produced women in appointive positions rather than elective as is the case presently. It is an indicator of the pitfall of gender quotas in effectively addressing gender disparity in societies. Gender quotas are less and at variance with the norms, precepts of political participation and representation in government. Indeed, "there are no short-cuts to power" (Goetz, 2002: 549) except by political participation and representation in the structures and processes of governance. Using the National Gender Policy of 35% affirmative action as a panacea for women inclusion in Nigerian politics could be likened to the administration of a dosage of two tablets of 200mg (each) of paracetamol (analgesic) as against two tablets of 500mg (each) on an adult.

Within Sociology, there have been significant advances in examining male dominance in the society. The paper adopts the Gender Structure Approach to explain the growing invisibilization of women in Nigerian politics. The approach is situated in the Conflict model and a blend of Feminist and Marxist theories of gender inequality. This approach focuses on the factors that are external to women such as gendered institutions, language, employment, law, religion, mass media, etc as reinforcing male dominance in Nigerian politics. The social structure polarizes and ranks women in a way that is unequal in resources, power, prestige and opportunities. In other words, the social structure creates and sustains gender stratification in the society.

### **Methodology**

This paper critically explores the realities of women participation in Nigerian politics particularly within the period 1999 to 2015. The research method adopted for the study is critical ethnography. The approach best suits the study as both examine the social structures and institutional bases of women discrimination and exclusion in Nigerian politics. Data were collected from official statistics, historical sources, mass media and participant observation methods. Data collated were presented in tables (with frequencies and percentages) and analyzed descriptively.

### **Women's Political Participation**

Politics is a process by which individuals as members of a group share ideas and participate in activities of acquiring and wielding power. The whole essence of politics revolves around the acquisition of political power, authority and control over human and material resources of a state. Nigerian women like their male counterpart equally seek to articulate power through political representation. Alapiki (2010:176) maintains that records of women in decision making positions worldwide have shown that women in politics contribute to "redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda that reflect and address concerns as well as providing new perspectives on mainstream political issues". Since independence women's political participation in elections has steadily increased but with marginal progress in their representation. A great number of girls and women are mostly involved at the level of voter registration and voting. It is assumed that there are more registered female voters than the male though there are no official statistics from the Independent National Electoral Commission to back up this claim. A statement credited to the former President Goodluck Jonathan on July 14, 2012 at the meeting of African First Ladies asserts that "women can vote us out come 2015." Reacting to another development the former president commented that the 2012 governorship election in Edo state had shown that women voters out-number their men counterpart and that they can utilize their numerical strength for electoral purposes (Punch: July 27, 2012).

Some critics of the gender equality thesis such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Hobbes, even Plato had questioned the rationale for women's inclusion in politics. Nigeria could not achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and failed to ensure that women effectively participate in the formal structures and processes of governance. This is in line with the 2006 National Gender Policy which states that "women's empowerment and gender equality underpin the achievement of all other MDGs." Women are mostly vulnerable to conflicts, poverty, diseases and environmental problems. Nigeria's developmental prospects are tied to women's increased participation and representation in governance. Any developmental model that does not carry women along will be counter-productive because of their centrality to development. This calls for a paradigm shift in redressing gender imbalance in Nigerian politics. Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger is dependent on empowering women through education. Armed with the right knowledge, child mortality rates will reduce while ensuring improved health for women. An educated woman will be favourably disposed to take necessary precautions and adequate treatment for HIV/AIDS, malaria and other killer diseases. Above all, the woman would ensure that environmental resources are not depleted. A woman empowered is a generation sustained.

Much as the men, women are entitled to political participation and representation in government as enshrined in the United Nations charter on Human Rights. They have a right to vote and to be voted for. It appears that women in Nigeria are given the right to vote and not to be voted for. The grass-root campaigns during elections only drum women's support for their parties and candidates. During the April 2011 and 2015 elections, the former Nigerian First Lady Dame Patience Jonathan used the pet project as a platform for gaining women's support for the husband's presidential bid. It is noteworthy that Women for Change and Development Initiative did not sponsor any female aspirant in the elections. The political merger between three former opposition parties (Action Congress, Congress for Progressive Change and All Nigeria Peoples Party) that brought into existence the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) has not even helped matters. For instance, in the House of Representatives election results APC produced five women while PDP had ten women elected under their platform (INEC; 2015:212). Women's support and votes were solicited with a pledge to

appoint more women in the cabinet. Most of the successes recorded in women's political participation and governance is largely due to the concerted effort and support of many non-governmental organizations.

Women's representation in structures and processes of governance adds value to politics. With the capacity to nurture their offspring women can engender sustainable development in the country. In spite of the fact that politics is gendered, corruption cannot be assumed to be gendered. The point made here is that women's presence in politics and governance to a large extent will enhance effective redistribution of resources. The welfare state theory in capitalist democracies argue that "men and women allocate resources differently, and that women tend to favour a redistributive agenda, and to spend more on children's education, social services and health" (Clots-Figueras; 2011, Miller; 2008, Bolzendahl; 2007, Alesina and La Ferrara; 2005). In the same vein, the Gender Report (2012:53) shows that "an increase in the number of women elected into office at different levels changes the way resources are allocated in favour of areas that enhance human development." The impeccable records set by some women in Nigeria and their invaluable contributions to national development lend credence to these. Women's participation and representation in governance is an index of human development. Corroborating this view, Bari (2005) asserts that "out of twelve countries where women representation in parliament is more than 33%, nine of them are ranked in the high human development category." Women's roles as mothers predispose them to cater for the men, children, youth and aged properly. Evidences on political participation in Nigeria are lopsided and skewed towards male dominance. One hundred years after the commemoration of women's day in Nigeria the picture is still gloomy. Women are invisible and lack access to governance therefore, decision-making processes. Majority of women in governance are appointed and not elected. An increment from 10% appointments to women during former president Olusegun Obasanjo's administration to 33% in former president Goodluck Jonathan's administration has been reduced to about 16% in the present administration of president Buhari. These appointees play their roles on male terms and are prone to be pliable. In 2006, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (former minister of Finance and External Affairs in President Obasanjo's government) resigned the appointment in order to circumvent government's attempt to make her politically malleable. However, in the immediate past administration of President Jonathan the minister's integrity was brought to question as the supervising minister of the economy.

Since the return to civilian government in 1999, more female contestants are increasingly appearing on the murky waters of Nigerian politics. Women's levels of involvement and participation in elections have been progressive. Irabor (2011:4) made an obvious observation that "the number of women who contested for elective positions at previous elections were significantly low" compared to the number in 2011. The worst is the case in 2015. In 2007, out of a total number of seven thousand one hundred and sixty (7160) contestants only six hundred and twenty eight (628) representing 8.8 percent were women. A breakdown of this statistics shows that there was one (1) female presidential aspirant, fourteen (14) vice-presidential, fourteen (14) governorship and five (5) female deputy governorship aspirants. Also, in the 2011 general elections there were only nine hundred and nine female (909) aspirants representing 9.06 percent out of a total of ten thousand and thirty seven (10,037) contestants for various positions.

**Table 1: Participation in April 2011 and 2015 Elections by Gender**

Office contested	2011			2015		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
President	19 (1)	1 (0)	20	13 (1)	1 (0)	14
Vice-President	17 (1)	3 (0)	20	10 (1)	4 (0)	14
Governor	340 (36)	13 (0)	353	<b>293 (29)</b>	<b>1 (0)</b>	<b>380</b>
Deputy Governor	289 (35)	58 (2)	347	<b>317 (25)</b>	<b>63 (4)</b>	<b>380</b>
Senate	801 (101)	92 (8)	893	<b>625 (101)</b>	122 (8)	747
House of Reps	2188 (335)	220 (25)	2408	<b>1507 (346)</b>	267 (15)	1774

Number elected in brackets. Source: Salihu (2011: 70-71) updated by author.

Table 1 indicates that more women contested in the 2011 and 2015 elections than previous elections with declining success. In 2015, even though there was an increase in the number of female aspirants to governorship and deputy governorship positions, all female governorship candidates were not elected. Regrettably, the number of elected female deputy governors fell from 6 in the 2007 general elections to 2 after the 2011 elections. The female deputy governors in 2011 were from Ekiti and Lagos state which have consistently shown some interest in redressing gender inequality in politics since 1999 in that regard. In 2015 general elections Senator Aisha Jummai Alhassan finished second in the Taraba state gubernatorial race. The data below is a tabular presentation of the frequency of women’s representation in governance since the return to democracy. It was observed that “only one in every fourteen female candidates was elected, compared to one in every seven males” (DFID, 2012: 70).

**Table 2: Number of Elected Women in Governance 1999 – 2015**

Office	1999		2003		2007		2011		2015	
	Seats	No. & %	Seats	No. & %	Seats	No. & %	Seats	No. & %	Seats	No. & %
President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
V. President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Senate	109	3(2.8)	109	4(3.7)	109	9(8.3)	109	8(7.3)	109	8 (7.3)
House of Rep	360	791.9)	360	21(5.8)	360	27(7.5)	360	25(6.9)	360	15 (4.1)
Governor	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0	29	0 (0)
Dep. Gov.	36	1	36	2(5.5)	36	6(16.6)	36	1	29	4 (
State H. Asse.	990	24(2.4)	990	40(3.9)	990	57(5.8)	990	68(6.9)	990	43 (4.3)
LGA Chair.	710	13(1.8)	774	15(1.9)	740	27(3.6)	740			
Councilors	6368	69(1.1)	6368	267(4.2)	6368	235(3.7)	6368			

Number elected in brackets. Source: Salihu (2011: 70-71) updated by author.

Table 2 depicts the level of women exclusion in governance. The high female population of the country is not proportionally reflective of the number of elected female parliamentarians as portrayed in the above data. Comparatively, a sub-Saharan African nation like Niger Republic had sixteen (16) female parliamentarians out of a total of about one hundred and thirty (130). In 2015, women in Rwanda occupied 61 out of 106 seats in parliament while in Senegal, 65 out of 150 seats in parliament were won by women. The data also shows that some of the feats notched up between 1999 -2007 declined in the 2011 and 2015 general elections. The April 2011 governorship elections took place in only twenty-six (26) states due to the apex court's pronouncements on tenure of office. Elections conducted in the other seven states produced no female governor and a deputy in Ekiti. These states include Kogi, Bayelsa, Adamawa, Cross River, Sokoto, Edo, Ondo, Ekiti and Osun. It would be recalled that due to court interpretation on Governor Peter Obi's tenure in 2007, the governorship election in Anambra state took place in March 2010 and 2014. In March 2015, governorship elections took place in twenty-nine (29) states only while that of Kogi and Bayelsa were done later in the year. None of the two produced a female governor or deputy governor.

Furthermore, the declining fortunes of women in the 2011 and 2015 general elections could be located in the structural imperatives of the major political parties in Nigeria. These include male dominance, sexual politics, cynicism and gate keeping. Women are short-changed in the political process and these impugn the parties' political will to redress gender imbalance in politics. A flashback to the events that led to the removal of the first female speaker of the green carpet chamber (House of Representatives) is imperative. Hon. Patricia Etete was forced out of office based on an alleged 645 billion naira scam in spearheaded by the 'integrity group' of the lower legislative house. In a dramatic twist at the end of the same 6<sup>th</sup> National Assembly in 2011, the former speaker; Patricia Olubunmi Etehe was cleared of all allegations of fraud and vindicated by the same chamber. What an intrigue! In a similar circumstance, discrimination against women was played out in the green carpet chamber of the 7<sup>th</sup> National Assembly. Party intrigues saw the imposition and election of Aminu Tambuwal over the female candidate Mulikat Akande earlier nominated for the position. It is an insidious trend and deliberate ploy to entrench male dominance by conquest in order to ensure their booty. Against the backdrop of these political machinations, the paper explores the constraints to women participation and representation in governance as a whole in contemporary Nigerian politics.

### **Results and Discussion**

Gender Report (2012: 69) highlights that "Nigeria is now ranked 118 out of 192 countries" in terms of gender parity. The low representation of women in Nigeria's federal legislature is significantly below the global average (15%), and far behind South Africa, Finland and Rwanda's representation (43%, 43% and 56% respectively)." A plethora of obstacles threaten the attainment of effective women participation in politics and governance. They are systemic and marked inhibitions which are complex blend of ideological/conceptual, attitudinal and material relations between men and women. These constitute the bases for women's exclusion in politics.

(a) Political Philosophy: The gendered nature of politics has a bias for male-stream politics. Political thinkers and thoughts intensified this preference by relegating women to the background. Classical political philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and others believe that there is no place for women in politics. As such, they are to be confined to the private spheres of life. They further advised that women be engrossed with child rearing, nurturing and other domestic activities peculiar to the home. In spite of the latter influence of liberal and feminist political thoughts that advocate women's inclusion in politics public policy



domain is male centred in Nigeria. The aftermath of this indoctrination is the sexual politics witnessed even in modern day democracies. A historical perspective to Nigerian politics and governance from independence till date attests to the fact of male dominance.

(b) Norms and Values- Patriarchy: Male dominance is sacrosanct and rooted in the traditional norms and values of the different groups that form the Nigerian entity. Female politicians are entangled in a peculiar web of patriarchal and religious norms that negate gender equity in governance. Typically, boys and girls internalize the norms which construe different gender roles and grow up to act in such manner. Girls are brought up to accept the restrictions that society imposes on them as mechanisms of social control. The Federal Ministry of women Affairs and Social Development (2006: 6) aptly describes Nigeria as a “highly patriarchal society, where men dominate all spheres of women’s lives.” The process of socialization entrenches this normative divide in gender roles. Women’s perception, world-view and out-look is subsequently shaped towards accepting the repugnant values in order to fit into the roles assigned to them. Failure to adhere to the prescribed codes of conduct attracts sanctions and disparaging remarks against such women. It is in this light that female politicians are viewed. Societal norms subjugate women’s right to the political dominance of men.

(c) Religion and Stereotyping: Christian and Islamic religious beliefs lend support to male domination in public and private spheres. Women who venture into politics is believed cannot make good wives. It is seen as a challenge to patriarchal authority. Women’s entrance into politics attract prejudice, discrimination and even sexual innuendos as hurdles that must be scaled through. Also, women’s roles as mothers and wives are mitigating circumstances that affect their role in politics. Conflicting family roles hamper women’s involvement in politics and vice-versa. Due to the clandestine nature of political meetings (caucus) female candidates may not be able to participate in the key decision-making processes. Holding party meetings at unconventional hours help to whittle down women’s chances of selection. These and others are part of the socio-cultural imperatives that endanger women’s inclusion in Nigerian politics.

(d) Government: Governments’ inadvertent lack of political will to implement global and international policies is the crux of the lingering politics of inequality. Successive governments in Nigeria have failed to fulfill their obligations in the compacts on the rights of women. Rather, emphasis is on dissipating women’s potentials and capabilities to engender development through appointments. The eight national assembly displayed their aversion to gender equality by dropping a bill seeking gender parity in Nigeria. Non-implementation of the agreements of the Beijing conference and others impede women’s inclusion in politics by implication, stalls the development process. Implementation of the terms and articles of these conventions will give a fillip to the plight of Nigerian women. The situation casts aspersions on government’s willingness to address gender imbalance in politics. By extension, raises doubt about government’s preparedness in achieving the 35% affirmative action target for women in elective positions.

(e) Legal factors: Women’s visibility in Nigerian politics is hampered by certain legal restrictions which smother women’s effort in being elected into public office. Married female aspirants are required to contest only in the wards where their husbands are registered. This restriction limits women to electorates who may not be familiar with the candidates thereby reducing their chances of selection at the grass-root. On the other hand, female candidates in the northern zone of the country have had much problem to contend with. Whereas female electorates in the south had participated in the electoral process since 1960 their counterparts

in the north were until 1979 denied the right to discharge their civic responsibility of suffrage. Religious and traditional practices confined women to the private domain. The *purdah* based sex segregation restricts female movement for fear of immorality thereby hindering their freedom and participation in politics.

(f) Party structures and Dynamics: Party primaries and selection of candidates is a determinant factor that undermines increased women participation and visibility in governance. Party processes are fraught with problems like godfatherism, sexual politics and intrigues. A new dimension to the problem is the emergence of godmothers as was the case in Abia state. Many of the big political parties lack internal democracy especially in the selection of flag-bearers. The result is the series of litigations in the Nigerian political landscape which are set-backs to the political process. The landmark judgments of the Supreme Court that restored Governor Chibuike Amaechi of Rivers state, Senator Hope Uzodinma of Imo state and Senator Margery Okadigbo of Anambra state all of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) are instances.

It is also worthy of mention that party executives or big wigs impose initiation into various cults on potential candidates to ensure absolute control and malleability of candidates. The Okija shrine saga that surrounded the selection of a former governor of Abia state by the predecessor and others depict the barbaric roles of political godfathers and godmothers in the nation's democratic journey. Another notable challenge to women participation in the party process of selection is the fact that majority of the female supporters/members who are at the grass-root are under-represented at parties' state, zonal and federal primaries. In other words, only a minority few are selected and eligible to vote at the state and federal conventions. The only executive position given to women in the major political parties is usually the Woman Leader. It is a glaring discrimination that raises doubt on the possible out-come of political parties' constitutional adoption of the 35% affirmative action for women in public office. A more worrisome trend is the fact that most of the female players only step into an existing family or political connection. Irabor (2011: 11) analyzes the implication of this politics of exclusion to mean that "only persons with strong political affiliations either by virtue of their parents, spouses or other close relatives' political cleavage with strong economic base can aspire or contest for elections starting with the party primaries." Once more, this development is a clear indication of the tenacity of cabals and the danger it portends for women's political emancipation.

(g) Violence: Most elections in Nigeria have been marred by violence. Apart from the 2011 and 2015 general elections that were widely acclaimed to be relatively free and fair, the history of elections in Nigeria is the history of violence and malpractice. Political rivals try to outwit each other through such acts of violence like thuggery, rape, physical assault, kidnapping, assassination and the like. Pre and post-election violence not only dampen women's political interest rather deter prospective entrants into politics. Ladbury (2011) affirms that "in a recent survey in Northern Nigeria, respondents identified youth gangs hired by politicians to intimidate rivals and the general population as their security concern." Violence is a form of irregularity that had marred most elections in the country. Election violence does not augur well for increased women involvement in politics. Women who cannot stand these threats are forced to give in and abort their political ambitions. Post-election violence in the April 2011 in some northern states claimed many lives including National Youth Service Corp members who served as ad-hoc staff in the elections. The prevalence of political violence during elections erodes the confidence of the electorate in the



system. Thugs are used to snatch ballot boxes and election materials and intimidate electoral officers in order to rig elections.

(h) Finance: Due to the high cost of running an election, potential women politicians may not be able to actualize their dreams of power articulation. BBC News of March 26, 2015 assessed the 2015 general elections in Nigeria as “the most expensive election ever to be held on the African continent”. Fund is imperative for executing electioneering campaigns and rallies at various levels. Closely related to this need are the indispensability, far-reaching impact and expensive nature of media packages (electronic, print and the new media) in contemporary elections. Effective grass-root mobilization for support and awareness is hinged on the use of hand-bills, posters, banners, bill-boards, jingles, columns, debates, advertorials, web-sites and the like. Presentation of manifesto through the media offers a good and veritable platform for the assessment of a candidate’s credibility and formation of public opinion. Unfortunately, the intrinsic nature of the economic relations between men and women hinder women from actively engaging in politics. Majority of Nigerian women at the grass-root are not engaged in paid employment. This leaves the task of political participation in the hands of few. Contrariwise, women in paid employment are constrained by unfavourable fiscal and public policies including high income discrepancies between them and their male counterparts. Women who dare to contest in the polls rarely get sponsorship because potential sponsors are scared that they may not be elected therefore, would not re-coup their investment.

(i) Monetization of the electoral process: Exorbitant registration fees for picking nomination forms are put in place by political parties. Perhaps, the quantum increase in the stipulated benchmark spending for all elective positions is a contributory factor to gender imbalance in politics. Monetization of the electoral process portends disastrous consequences for the quality of governance and women participation in Nigeria’s nascent democracy. For instance, the amended 2010 Electoral Act stipulates one billion naira benchmark spending for presidential candidates as against 500 million naira provided by the 2006 Electoral Act. Others include 200 million for governorship aspirants, Senate 40 million, House of Representatives 20 million, State House of Assembly and local government chairperson 10 million respectively, and councillorship 1 million naira. On the other hand, political parties charge aspirants heavily for sundry fees at the federal and state levels. The People’s Democratic Party (PDP) collected the following fees for nomination forms at the national level: President – 10 million, Governor – 5 million, Senate –3 million, House of Representatives – 2.5 million and State House of Assembly – 1 million naira respectively. As a matter of fact, female aspirants in the party and other parties collect forms free of charge but incur additional expenses. Again, for the Senate position in PDP, the national headquarters collected 200,000 naira for expression of interest otherwise known as “formalization of political intent” form and 2 million naira for the nomination to contest primary election (party primaries) form. State chapters collect administrative charges for 300,000 naira, 150,000 naira for ‘formalization of political intent’, request tax certificates for three years amounting up to 300,000 naira, endorsement of intent form by thirty registered members of the party from all the wards in that senatorial zone. In 2015, PDP collected the following fees for nomination and intent forms for the different categories of aspirants: Presidential – 22 million naira; Governorship – 11 million; senatorial – 4 million and four hundred thousand naira; House of Representatives – 2 million and four hundred thousand naira and State House of Assembly – 1 million and two hundred thousand naira. The situation is not peculiar to PDP as Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) charged 5 million and 500,000 naira for the Presidential position. The All Grand Progressive Alliance (APGA)

also charged 3.5 million naira for senatorial seat, etc. Also, in 2015, APC (coalition party) collected 27.5 million naira for presidential aspirant. Women in politics equally contend with internal and external mechanisms for sycophancy at various levels.

### **Conclusion**

The main pre-occupation of this paper has been the examination of the growing invisibilization of women in Nigerian politics. A situational assessment of women participation in Nigerian politics from 1999 to 2015 was leveraged on wider historical reference to other societies. The peculiar circumstances in which male domination exist even in politics were reviewed. Emphasis has been on the level of women's participation and representation in Nigeria. Attention was given to the constraints to effective women involvement, participation and representation in politics and governance. It is inferred from the discussions, comments and data available that gender inequalities in politics is an institutionalized discrimination. Also, the paper debunks the claim of diffidence as postulated by some writers and notes that these social, structural or institutional barriers contribute to any noticeable apathy in women for politics. Although there are no constitutional inhibitions on women yet, socio-cultural, ideological, political and economic imperatives circumscribe women's right to participate in politics and governance. These are the gender realities that exist in the political space of Nigeria.

Based on the understanding that women's destiny is not determined by their biological characteristics, the paper advocates greater and increased involvement and participation of women in the party structures for greater representation in governance. The resilience and commitment of Nigerian women is a viable tool if meaningful progress is to be made in the fight against women exclusion in politics. Effective women participation and representation in politics and governance would be a mirage unless Nigerian women take the bull by the horns. Men may feel threatened by women's increased participation but will continue to hold onto power even through the application of Machiavellian principles. Since there are no short cuts to power, women participation and representation in politics and governance can only be achieved through the electoral process. Also, the article reiterates the following observations: Government's sincerity of purpose is pivotal to the actualization of the national Gender Policy of 35% affirmative action target for women in elective positions. The implementation of the articles of all international agreements on the rights of women and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) will bolster effective women representation in politics. Government can facilitate women's contribution to national development by providing the enabling environment and a level playing ground for all actors in the electoral process. An over-arching issue is an orientation shift from gender specific roles especially in politics. Many decades of male dominance in the decision-making process has not translated to meaningful development in the country. Nigeria could not meet the eight Millennium Goals (MDGs) and gender imbalance in governance has not been properly addressed. Regrettably, the eight national assembly threw out the bill on gender equality. All policies and provisions that make for the monetization of the electoral process need to be jettisoned to curb the corruptive tendencies of elected officials.

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