Gender Inequalities In Nigerian Politics

Cecilia C. Okoronkwo
GENDER INEQUALITIES IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

BY

CECILIA C. OKORONKWO

Thesis Advisor

Michael S. McGraw, Ph.D.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Since ancient times, women have been noticeably absent from participation in the decision-making body. Thomas Aquinas, 13th century theologian, once pointed out that women's souls are not fully developed, and Jewish men once began their morning prayers by giving thanks that they were not women. The Women's International Center has done research on early attitude toward women and notes "the ideal woman in both Judaism and Christianity is a productive being who cares for her children and husband. She humbly accepts control by her husband and other male domination" (1994, pp.1-2). Again, a woman should be docile, obedient, quiet, meek, and passive; she should not question nor challenge any male authority (Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia 1994-1995).

International Women Center researchers have done research on the history of women in America and have created a Web site that provides information (http://www.wic.org). That Web site points out that throughout history, generally, women have had fewer legal rights and career opportunities than men. In fact, motherhood is regarded as women's most important career. However, in the 20th century, women in some countries have gained the right to vote and have improved their educational and job opportunities beyond motherhood. In addition, they fought for and to a large extent accomplished a reassessment of traditional notions of their roles in the society.

In early days, women were exclusively seen as the creative basis of human life. In addition, they have been considered not only mentally inferior to men but also a main cause of temptation and evil. For instance, in Greek mythology, a woman, Pandora,
opened the forbidden box and brought plagues and unhappiness to man kind. Furthermore, early Roman law portrayed women as children, forever inferior to men (Compton’s News Media, 1995).

For instance, St. Jerome, the fourth-century Latin doctor of the Catholic Church, said: “Woman is the gate of the devil, the path of wickedness, the sting of the serpent, in a word, a perilous object” (Ruth, 1980, p. 393). Thomas Aquinas, the 13th-century theologian, (as cited in Women’s International center, 1995) said that woman was “created to be man’s helpmeet, but her unique role is in conception... since for other purposes men be better assisted by other men” (p. 1).

According to the early fathers, “women’s bodies are evil, seductive, offensive, and dirty. Women are carnal and men spiritual. Women are body; men are mind. Women are sex and sex is evil. Women are pleasure and passion, and condemned” (Ruth, 1980, p. 393).

The Bible, however, is a nonstop and glowing testimony to the dignity of women. In the creation of the human race (male and female), God gave men and women equal personalities, endowing with them the unchallengeable rights and responsibilities of human beings (Genesis 1:26-28). God then showed the dignity of women in the highest form, by allowing the Blessed Virgin Mary to assume human flesh. The Catholic Church honors her as the mother of God, referring to her as the new Eve, and presenting her as the model of redeemed women. Jesus had so much respect toward women that he called some to be his followers and his friends, he appeared to a woman (Mary Magdalene) on Easter morning before coming to his other disciples, and he entrusted to women the mission to carry the good news of the resurrection to the apostles. These are all signs that
confirm the special regard of the Lord Jesus for women, man, and society should have similar regard (Navarro-Vall, 1995).

Today, women account for approximately one half of every country's population, yet they are not equally represented in public life anywhere in the world. A recent report of women's representation in the government of various countries, for example, provides miserable figures concerning their involvement in politics.

The United States and the United Kingdom, among the world’s oldest democracies, had just 9.1% and 9.0% representation, respectively, in their legislatures in 1996. Yet, these figures are a major improvement considering that in 1992, they were 2.9 and 3.7 percent respectively. Although some countries such as Norway and Sweden have as high as 35% to 60% representation of women in the parliament, others, like Nigeria, had just about 5% in 1990-1999 elections (Nwankwo, 1996).

Before Nigerian independence in 1960, the British administrators who colonized Nigeria had nothing to do with women. They suppressed a well-established traditional institution that protected women, expressed their interests, and accommodated their advice for the well-being of the country. Since then, the situation has remained the same. Nigerian women have continued to be represented poorly in politics and public decision-making (Nwankwo, 1996).

In spite of their political affiliation, women in all countries must overcome a host of obstacles that limit their political careers. "Most obstacles to progress consist of deficiencies of various kinds," according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU 2000), including lack of time, training, information, self-confidence, money, support, motivation, women's network, and solidarity between women.
Paradoxically, the first thread of this disempowering and restraining web is usually woven at home, and many at a time, with the help of women themselves. A United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization report observed that centuries-old attitudes have not only made many women doubt whether changes are necessary, but they also "believe that their social roles as mothers and wives are what they really need and want. To make it worse, these women, with the help of their husbands, transfer this concept of life to their daughters or younger sisters. The wearing away of women’s confidence in their ability to succeed in the world outside the home, the report says, as a rule, starts at home." (pp. 1-2).

In every culture, there are prejudice, and stereotypes. The belief still holds sway that women belong in the kitchen and with the children, not at election rallies or in the speaker’s chair. The media often reinforce traditional images of women, who, upon entering politics, also often withstand the worst of verbal and psychological abuse. In impoverished countries wracked by civil strife and deteriorating economic and social conditions, women are strapped by the tasks of managing everyday life and looking after their families. Women all over the world are marginalized in the sphere of public life (Anonymous, 2000).

Jean O’Barr (1984), writing on African women in politics, states that after “a global survey of women in politics, most African countries register five percent or less of women at every level, in every sphere of government” (p.154). Interestingly, some researchers mentioned various factors that led to the near absence of women in public life. These factors, which are complex, include poor education, low socio-economic,
status, and cultural attitudes that put the women’s place firmly in the home. These factors interact to produce a hard-to-disentangle web of barriers that strengthen the cruel cycle.

However, the focus of this study is to evaluate and analyze the role of women in Nigerian politics. The author will explore whether politics continues the same political attitude that women’s positions are in their homes and, if so, how do these influence the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward political women in Nigerian society.

Nigerian Profile

Nigeria is a Federal republic in West Africa. It became an independent member of the British Commonwealth in 1960. In 1963, Nigeria became a republic. It is situated between Cameroon and Benin. There are three different regions: the Western, Northern, and Eastern, which are dominated respectively by the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Ibo tribes. The population includes hundreds of other ethnic groups, each with its own language, customs, religion, and traditional political system. There are about 19 major dialects and English is the second language. Nigeria is by far the most populated country in Africa, but it is rich in mineral resources especially in oil. Oil was discovered in the south in 1960. Nigeria is now one of the major producers of petroleum. Nigeria is a member of the Oil Producing Economic Countries (OPEC). The Naria (= 100 kobo=one US dollar) is the official Nigerian currency. Abuja is the capital of Nigeria; it was formerly in Lagos, which is the largest modern industrial city in the country. There are about 36 states in Nigeria (Krieger, 1998).
Research Question

What are the roles of women in Nigerian politics past and present?

Why has there been this near absence of women in politics, including in Nigeria?

This study analyzes the gender inequalities in Nigerian politics and redefines this problem in terms of the present political situation.

Subsidiary Questions

1. Do Nigerian women eschew positions of political power because they are too passive and submissive by nature?
2. Are Nigerian women socialized to be subordinate?
3. Are the primary roles of wife and mother too demanding to permit Nigerian women’s other kinds of activity?
4. Are there some special circumstances that mitigate against women’s representation in politics and in public life?

The author answers these questions by reviewing relevant literature and through a study of women who have succeeded in entering Nigerian politics. The literature review also provides an overview of politics in Nigeria and the role women played in this country during the colonial era.

Need for the Study

According to Dr. Pramilla Senanayake, (1993) assistant secretary-general of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, “if the world is to develop, women must be actively involved. People tend to get set in their ways and to resist change” (p.6). On a similar note Sue Slipman, (1984) said, “I don’t think men will change until they are
forced to share power with women. They will not be forced to do this until women have the direction and the confidence to take power” (p.58).

A review of Nigeria’s attempt at contemporary government and civil rule shows a 4% average of women involvement in power, although women constitute about 56% of voters (World Bank Report, 1996, p13). This is an abnormal situation, especially, when viewed against the background that traditionally women had an independent role in government among the various ethnic groups (Ibo, Hausa, & Yoruba) that remain representative of the present-day Nigerian nation.

In 1995, the United Nations held a conference related to equality, development, and peace, the Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women. The message evident from that conference is that the achievement of women in many aspects of life is still a hallucination. Nowhere in society is this more obvious than in the area of decision-making, particularly in politics, education, and other public offices. Women’s involvement in politics is essential because it is through politics that they can determine their priorities, their values, and the allocation of their resources (IDEA, 1997).

In many countries, women have been practically absent in politics. Yet, it is not because of their lack of interest or will. Within the past few years, women’s voices have become very strident in their quest for power. Yet, there are many socio-cultural and educational obstacles that hinder the realization of their objectives. There is a need to change and to develop strategies to remove these obstacles or barriers. And women must be prepared to deal effectively with them. After a review of the literature on the role of Nigerian women in politics, the author explores the poor political representation of
women in Nigerian society and tries to examine how women’s representation in Nigerian politics and public life could be made better.

Definition of Terms

1. **Ibo**: Eastern part of Nigeria
2. **Yoruba**: Western part of Nigeria
3. **Hausa**: Northern part of Nigeria
4. **IPU**: Inter-Parliamentary Union. IPU was founded in 1889 and has its headquarters in Geneva. Its membership includes 139 affiliated national parliaments and five associated regional parliamentary assemblies. IPU promotes partnership between men and women as one of the cornerstones of democracy. In 1994, it adopted a plan of “Action” to remedy existing inequities in the participation of men and women in political life. IPU has a liaison office at United Nations Headquarters in New York (Inter-Parliamentary Union Report, 2000).

Limitation

This study will not review the extensive research in the general area of women and politics, but rather, it will focus on gender inequalities in Nigerian politics. However, the earlier works of important researchers in the field and studies written during the Women’s Movement of the 1970s, a time thought to be instrumental in changing our views about women will be included.

The author is also sensitive to the limited number of studies focusing on female politically-dominated issues. It is not the author’s intention to study this topic solely from the female perspective; however, the limited research on women creates an imbalance of perspective and content in world politics. Finally, in studying women,
politics, and their relationship in society, the author will exclude women in other countries from the study.
Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background

In no country do women enjoy equal political status, access, or opportunities to influence the direction of society. Women hold only 12% of parliamentary seats and 5% of cabinet seats worldwide. Women and their children are 80% of the world's 23 million refugees fleeing conflict and civil war (Nanette and Magda, 1993). The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, supports women's efforts to increase their capacity to influence the direction of society and the political mainstream of their countries, to remove the obstacles that prevent women from having access to power, and to expand women's roles as political actors in civil society and within governments.

The Pope's focus on women's governance and leadership is a direct response to the challenge issued at the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) for everyone to break down the barriers that keep women from participating fully in the political decisions that control their lives (Navarro-Vall, 1995).

The fact that few women participate in any country's decision-making positions is based, to a large degree, on the fact that women are different from men. Apart from the obvious physiological differences, women's experiences, needs, and views differ to some extent from those of men. Even with the best of intentions, it is impossible for men to sufficiently. Beryl Nicholson (1986), discussing how Norwegian women fought for better representation in government, said:

The story of the Norwegian women's case was also comparable with the prevailing conception of representative democracy, which holds that elected
assemblies should reflect the composition of the electorate, the principle which forms the basis for fair geographical and party representation, and be representative of occupational groups furthermore, because women’s experience is so different from men’s, it was argued... that they had a particular contribution to make... There were limits to the extent to which one group in the society could represent the interests of another.’’ (p.12)

In the East, the attitude toward women seems more unfavorable. For example, in the ancient India, women were deprived of property rights or individual freedoms by marriage. Nevertheless, Hinduism, which developed in India after about 500 BC, required obedience of women toward men. Women had to walk behind their husbands, they could not own property, and widows could not remarry. In various cultures, male children were favored over female children (Women’s International Center, 1994 & 1995).

However, women made considerable attainments when they were allowed their personal and intellectual freedom. For example, in the middle ages, nuns played a major role in the religious life of Europe. Noble women enjoyed power and prestige. In the Renaissance, women were highly influential rulers. Some of these women include Queen Elizabeth of England in the 16th century, Catherine the Great of Russia in the 18th century, and Queen Victoria of England in the 19th century (Women’s International Center, 1994).

Women in the Western World

Women’s suffrage refers to women’s right to vote. Traditional patriarchal societies throughout history have denied women the vote on the grounds that women as daughters,
wives, and mothers were intrinsically dependent on the male head of family, who, in political dealings, stands for himself, his family, and the servants under him (Serinity 1998). Therefore, man, as the head of the family, was both an autonomous person in his own right and a head of a group of people dependent on him. Women, on the other hand, were inherently incapable of being either autonomous persons in their own right or leaders over others.

There were exceptions to this general rule, such as the occasional ruling queen in the absence of a male heir to a throne, and the independent, single propertied women. However, this exclusion of women from holding political office was based on the general belief of the social order as being determined either by God or the natural law of female inferiority.

There is a certain belief, however, that God designed the order of creation and made the rule that women, though morally equal to man in soul and hence redeemable to eternal life, were put under male control in society. This condition was intensified by the fall of man through sin, for which women were considered primarily responsible. Hence, women were twice as reliant on men in family and society, both by nature and as punishment for sin (Serinity, 1998).

According to the Islamic law of the 19th century, women are seen as inherently weaker, created by God with lesser judgment and incapable of making political decisions. For women to vote and participate in public life was seen as infringing on women’s modesty and opening the way for sexual immorality, a belief that has been echoed by anti- feminist Protestants and Catholics in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Langland and Gove, 1981).
For some historians of women’s suffrage, the issue under representation stays rooted in the political and intellectual concerns of social history. It is not surprising, as the development of women’s history as a field owes much to new social history. For women’s political, social, and educational equality with men has been an issue over several decades. Early leaders, including Mary Wolstone, Craft in England and Elizabeth Cady, demanded full legal and economic equality for women (www.Encyclopedia.com).

Gradually, women in the U.S. gained the right to own property and to enter the professions. In the 19th century, after a prolonged struggle for women’s suffrage led by Carrie Nation and others, women obtained the right to vote toward the end of 1920 by amendment of the U.S. Constitution. By 1928, women were fully enfranchised in Britain and throughout most of the countries in the world by 1950 (Laurel & Verta, 1993).

The National Organization for Women (NOW) has played a significant role in the restoration of feminism in the United States since the 1960s, stressing equal pay and employment opportunities, day care centers, the right to abortion, and the right to end sexual harassment and sex stereotyping. The movement failed in one of its main goals, however, that of securing approval of the federal Equal Rights Amendment. In addition, legalized abortion contributed to an anti-feminist response in the United States. Anti-feminists succeeded in reinstating some restrictions on abortion. However, much of what feminists wanted was gained in 1970 (Encyclopedia.com).

In the 1970, when women took it in their hands to define the world combining careers, marriage, family, and so on, from their point of view the movement changed from women’s liberation to feminism. Bruce Walter (1990) wrote,
“Women were different from men, but this fact was not a source of shame, but a source of pride. Feminism taught that women ought to be proud of their different bodies and perceptions. The male interpretations of the past were therefore boldly rejected and replaced with interpretations reflecting a women’s definition of reality” (p.108).

The feminist brief was so boldly accepted in some areas that it became the form and norm for truth. Women not only had claimed the right to name themselves, but also the right to name and define the world around them.

Women in Nigeria

In Nigeria in the 1930s to 1960s, there was a great dilemma facing women who wished to pursue careers. A female had two choices, either she proclaimed herself a woman, and therefore a less-than-achieving individual, or she proclaimed herself an achieving individual and therefore less a woman. If she chose the first option, she increased the chances of being a loved object, the kind of a girl whom men will woo and boast of, toast, and marry. But if she decided to follow a career, she ran the risk of losing forever her chance for the kind of love she wanted (Chafe, 1977).

Niara Sudarkasa (1993) speaks directly to this and other difficulties in women’s history. “At any given time, the experience of Nigerian women grows out of a complicated web of cultural values, specific social and economic circumstances, and the response of individual women to both.” (pp. 150-151).

Although the conflicts between marriage and career were not new in the 1930s, the context of the British colonization emphasized the traditional male role of the breadwinner and supposed threat to female employment. On the other hand, the Nigerian Biafran war produced a situation that made traditional roles seem less important. The
Nigerian’s work, family, cultural values, and personal aspirations must be seen in relation to each other and within the background of a specific historical period.

Historian, William Chafe (1977) observed that in southern Nigeria between the 1930 and 1960s, unmarried persons were regarded as “pitiable encumbrances,” and that “the home was the only field in which superior women might distinguish themselves” (p. 16).

The family, in turn, was generally perceived as a hierarchy, with the man as father and head, and women and children as his inferiors. Although the Ibo people believed that such an arrangement reflected a divine pattern, with man’s role in the home similar to God’s role in the universe, one did not have to be puritan to subscribe to the idea of patriarchy (Chafe, 1977, p. 16).

A Perspective on Nigerian Women

Nigerians believed that a woman’s task was to influence her husband through the humble role of housewife and mother and that it was essential that women should differentiate themselves as tender mothers and faithful wives rather than furious partisans. Since women’s ideal roles were to be supportive of their husbands, provide care for their children, and provide a haven from the troubles of the outside world, the idea that they might wish an independent life or career of their own seemed unnatural. As Chafe (1977), mentioned: “The office woman, no matter how successful, is a transplanted bouquet. Just as a rose comes to its fullest beauty in its own appropriate soil, so does a home woman come to her fairest blooming when her roots are struck deep in the daily and hourly affairs of her own most dearly beloved husband” (p.17).

However, if the cultural norms have remained relatively stable through time, the same cannot be said for the Nigerian social and economic situations. Women’s behavior
took shape against the backdrop of shifting economic demands, personal aspirations, crises, and demographic patterns. As society changed and the contours of the nations economy were distorted, women responded differently from generation to generation, sometimes initiating change and reacting to it and in the process often dividing along class or racial lines. (Ferre & Yancey, 1995).

In the analysis of the connection between cultural identity and political prohibition, the study of gender based political exclusion is best established in an understanding of political procedure in Nigerian states. Officially, Nigerian women hold equal political rights to men, obtaining the right to vote and to stand for election (International Institute for Labor Studies, 1994). But the way Nigerian states this function, whether as imagined in military or civilian regimes form of analysis, implies that women's participation is likely more limited than men's (Howard, 1986).

Based on a survey of military practices in Nigeria, women have been "male-dominated and oriented. Women of all classes and races have been excluded and subordinated" (Shaw, 1991, p.59). With regard to Nigerian politics, "few research enables us to measure how and to what degree politicians discriminate against or assist women or favor some women more than others" (Roberts & Williams 1991, p. 83). However, in general women occupy lower positions within political networks.

In the Nigerian background, women's inferiority is seen as customary, and her value, which is mirrored in her legal status, has been demoted and has continued to reduce her to the position of legal minority and forever under the sponsorship and protection of man for her entire life (Connors, 1988).
Most problems facing Nigerian women can be attributed to traditional law. This traditional law reduces a woman within an extended traditional family, places her under the enduring custody of a male relative, and strictly limits her ownership or inheritance of property. It denies her control over her children without the help of a male guardian going into agreements. In addition, she cannot sue or be sued (Connors, 1998). Women’s subordination rests on the establishment of traditional law. It is particularly connected to their vulnerability when unmarried; they do not have access to land, except through husbands, and insecurity arises when denied financial stipulation from their husband’s property on death or divorce (Connors, 1988).

The laws affecting Nigerian women’s civil rights have been greatly improved during the past 30 years; women’s roles in politics have made unquestionable progress, though they must be not counted as the chief influence in adjusting the laws. The selfishness of Nigerian men caused them to be willing to join in obtaining woman’s civil and political rights (Kukah, 1999).

Women’s Participation in Nigerian Politics

Historically, a woman’s life situation has always been the cause of worries and concern in Nigerian society. In spite of their irresistible numerical strength, despite serving as the anvils of labor and productivity, these efforts have never been converted into real power for women in society (Kukah, 1999) Women’s struggles in the post-colonial states have, therefore, been typified by an abundance of the recognizable elements of war sweat, tears, and blood (Kukah, 1999).

Women’s participation in Nigeria’s public life has been difficult, and society has not appreciated this struggle. Nigerian women’s struggles have been focused on such
stunning flashes as the Aba and Egba women’s riots in 1929 and 1947, when autocratic British colonial agents, plus reports that women would be taxed by the government, instigated the women in Eastern Nigeria to organize extremely violent protest in 1929. Women were able to succeed in their protest because of their strong unions and effective market associations with women in other communities. From the protest women gained the prevention of taxation, the dismissal of many warrant chiefs, some of whom were put on trial, the power to select new chiefs, and the appointment of several women court members (Kukah, 1999).

In 1959, other protests include, the Ngwa women’s opposition against the municipalisation of their communities; the Eastern region women’s resistance to a new school fee in 1958; and other chains of women protest between 1947 and 1958 led by Abeokuta Women’s Union (ABU), Mrs. Ransome Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, and Hajiya Gambo Sawabij (Seminar on Media Metaphors, 25 January, 1994).

However, women’s official organizational movements in Nigeria came about in 1953, after the National Women’s Union changed into the Federation of Nigerian’s Women Societies (FNWS). In 1959, the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) became an umbrella organization holding women’s dreams for the future (Kukah, 1999).

The extraordinary increase in the way many Nigerian women came to education in the 1970s and their resulting mobility within the practical and political system have gone a long way in civilizing the profile of the Nigerian woman. However, the flash stop seems to have come about in the mid-1980s with the United Nations’ Declaration of 1985 as Women’s Year. In addition, new drifts in the international movement of women, and the association of Nigerian women with such international organizations like the
International Federation of Female Lawyers, International Federation of University Women (IFUW), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), World Council of Catholic Women (WCCW), and so on, have added to the urgency in the struggle of women for a more important role in the public sphere (Kukah, 1999).

According to Hussaina Abdullah (1985), the women's movement in Nigeria can be generally grouped into three sections, the conservative, the developmentalist, and the feminist. Abdullah says that:

The conservatives are represented by the group which seeks to improve the position of women in society without overturning the socio-economic and political status quo, which reproduces male power and domination. The developmentalists; on the other hand, focus on mainly improving the standard of living of their members by initiating income-generating activities, co-operatives and projects; while the feminists seek to change the position of women through a total transformation of the basis of societal relations (p. 98).

In all, the emergence of so many women movements, only as with the human activists, is not a sign of weakness or lack of attention on the part of women. Rather, it is part of a larger picture of the restlessness that has taken over the Nigerian civil society since the military came to restrict the political space. (Osinulu and Mba, 1996).

Women's participation in national life has been informed by the changes in Nigerian society. For instance, post-independence Nigeria shaped a neo-colonial choice that flourished in imitating western styles of life. In fact, the apparent role of a woman was as a mixture of the conventional types of traditional and religious worldviews: women were to be seen and not heard. They were significant only to the point that they
added to their husband's achievements or position in society. This tendency has dominated the interaction between women and society, and it explains the role of women as mainly ceremonial, helpful, and flattering (Currell, 1993).

In the 1959 elections, the northern men resolutely refused the enfranchisement of their women, whereas, women in the south voted, but few women contested for seats in the House of Representatives. Those women in the East and the North did not participate publicly in bringing in the first republic.

Nkechi (1996), commenting on the full participation of the southern women, noted that the best they could get was one person, Wurola Esan, who was appointed to the senate of 36 members. No woman was elected to the 312-member House of Representatives and none joined the federal cabinet. She added,

In the 1961 general elections, three women were elected to the Eastern House of Assembly. There were no women ministers in the regional governments.

The two southern-based parties had women's wings, but there were no women in the top positions in the party. However, several women were elected to local government councils in the South" (p.17).

The military regime and all others dealt harshly with women's political participation. For some reason women were initially absent in the military rule and did not seem to count in the military schemes. Although the military later involved some civilians, there was no woman among them (Newman & Fryingly, 1980). However, in the second military regime in 1975, two regions, East Central and Lagos, appointed two women commissioners. There was no woman at the federal or state level during the third military regime.
In fact, women were totally unnoticed when selecting the 50 persons to draft the constitution in the return to democracy, and women reacted with extensive censure to their exclusion from the Constitution Drafting Committee. Later five women were eventually included in the 250-member constituent assembly that draws up the constitution. These women did a lot to get into the constitution the right of freedom against discrimination (Hiebert & Reuss, 1988). Yet, this resulted in little change for Nigerian women in 1987. For example, a major step taken was in 1987 when the wife of the Head of State, Ibrahim Babangida, adopted what she called “The Better Life for Rural Women Programme.” Since men objected by pointing out that the name was unfair since men, too, are rural dwellers and in need of a better life too, the programme was renamed “Better Life for Rural Dwellers. Whatever its weaknesses, the programme gained international attention, especially when Mrs. Babangida was awarded the Hunger Prize in 1991. In her speech at the awards ceremony, Mrs. Babangida said that, “the program was set up to reform women and adequately train them to react to the challenges of finding fulfillment in life. Unfortunately, the creditable objectives of the programme appeared to have been drenched in the ambitious enthusiasm of the elite who took over as officials. The programme received a lot of censure, but it brought a sort of political awareness to women and gave them an opportunity to work together for their common good” (Kukah, 1999, p.165).

However, in the process to fulfilling its promise to return to democracy in 1993, the military government held local government and governorship elections in 1990, and out of 1,297 local positions all over the country, women won 206 local positions. None was elected as governor, but two were chosen as deputy governors. In fact, only one
woman got into the 90-member senate in the 1992 National Assembly election and 12 women won seats in the 638-member House of Representatives that same year. The 1993 presidential election was believed to be the most free and fair in the history of the Nigerian political system. Many Nigerians were surprised when the military annulled the elections for supposed indiscretions that were not specified. As it happened three women contested for that election but it is unclear, whether they won because of the annulment (Toyo, 1999).

The overall result of the annulment of the 1993 election was the intensity of women’s marginalisation. In the May 1999 election, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) sources pointed out that in the National Assembly elections only 3 women were elected out of 109 senate members, 13 women gained the House of Representatives, no women were elected out of 36 governors, nor were any interested in contesting for the presidency (Toyo, 1999).

Obstacles to Women’s Participation in Politics

Historical and cultural factors have undermined women’s roles in public life throughout the world. In Nigeria, their access to the political system is more incomplete because of their conditions of poverty and low educational skills. Moreover, many women do not associate with politics; they often appear to decline the current practice of power, authority, and leadership. Nigerian women panic when faced with the demanding political campaigns, the aggressive media, and the uncovering of a history or their private lives.

A woman’s minimal impact on economic and social life is reflected in the political system. Representation of Nigerian women in high-level forums is unreasonably
low. No women have attained the status of head of state or government and Nigerian women are practically absent from the deliberative political bodies that influence the development program of the country. The political system is a better backer of women's representation as enduring performers in the society (http://www.anemoneweb.com).

These several factors hinder Nigerian women’s participation in politics.

**Lack of Confidence**

This is one of the major reasons for Nigerian women’s under representation in formal political institutions, including legislatures, governments, and political parties. According to Rule Wilma (1981), “with confidence and determination Nigerian women can attain the highest levels in the political procedure. In fact, women should learn to believe in themselves and drop the extensive view that men have to be their leader”(p.45). Women are equal to and have the same potential as men, but only they can fight for their rights. Women are very good campaigners, fundraisers, organizers, supporters, and mobilizes, but they never contested for presidential posts. A particular culture of terror stops women from contesting elections.

**Culture**

Almost all of the 250 different tribes in Nigeria share the same concept that the woman's position is in the home. The most important roles of women are defined as wives and mothers. How well she performs these roles gains her society’s recognition and respect. If a woman is considered not be to a good wife or mother, she accounts for nothing despite whatever she does in other areas of her life. In the Nigerian mentality, only married women are respectable women in society. For them, a woman’s dignity lies with her husband. Obviously, a woman without marriage cannot fit into the well-
respected position of wife. Motherhood is also regarded inside the tradition of marriage. Single mothers are scorned and children born outside of wedlock are the objects of nasty jokes (Nwankwo, 1996).

Furthermore, throughout Nigerian history, women have been valued variously as property, as cheap labor, and child bearers. The tradition of women as property dates from the earliest tribes when women were a kind of money, traded in exchanged for cattle and land (Heilbroner, 1970). Furthermore, Ahern (1976) says that, "The whole institution of ownership began by ownership of women. Even today, in the Nigerian cultures, the tradition of dowry continues to place money on women." (p.14).

Although placing a price on a woman is considered inhumane, the idea of women as signs of their husbands' wealth and status carries on, but in more slight and complicated forms. Tribal warriors fought wars and women were the prizes of triumph. The most successful warrior possessed the most beautiful and industrious female captives. Many women producing goods were signs of prestige for their husbands (Ahern, 1976).

Consequently, most Nigerian cultures still operate under the assumption that a woman will be married and will be dependent on the husband for the rest of her lifetime. This dependency today forms a more complex web affecting women's political lives, because they are not only dependent as individuals, but as groups and as a society. The culture has made it a woman's responsibility to stay home and does not consider her schedule at other jobs outside her home. Usually when a man helps in the household activities or childcare, it is at his own freedom of choice. Most of the time interested husbands may be disheartened from helping with housework, especially if his friends and
relatives see it as a sign of weakness on the part of the man. Sue Slipman (1986) said, “women’s domestic responsibilities mean there is little time to become involved in organizations around work such as trade unions and professional organizations where men have traditionally learnt their political skills” (p. 5).

Furthermore, customary laws deteriorate women’s position in most Nigerian communities. For example, women are not permitted to own land or other important property. Akin Ibidapo-Obe (1990) commented, “In some traditional societies...among the Ibos, Ibiobio, Annang Oron, Obalinko, Abua, and Ogai...the inheritors of man’s property...and his successors are his sons, brothers, father and uncles excluding daughters, wives, sisters, and mother” (p. 141).

The seclusion of women by the Muslims is another political obstacle for women. Although it is practiced in the Northern and Western part of Nigeria, the practice started after the Fulbe take over of the Hausa states in the early 19th century. This resulted in the slow introduction of seclusion among all classes. The major reason for the practice of seclusion is that Islamic tradition views women as sexual creatures, who, if they were not controlled, would distract men from the polite and grand quest for religion (Stobel, 1984).

Margaret Stobel (1984) went further to explain that “where seclusion was strictly followed, it could inhibit a woman from actively pursuing her own economic interests and force her independence on male representatives” (pp.94-95).

However, the cultural assertion of women’s inadequacy and inability to rule has become ingrained so intensely into the minds of so many Nigerian women that they do not consider politics and avoided any effort to transform their positions. Nigerians believed that if women were permitted to manage the seat of power, then society would
be destroyed. So, the inept male leader is preferable to a strong female counterpart. (Matland & Michelle, 1997).

In addition, part of female inferiority is the dual norm of the ethical practice placed on them. A woman is expected to be pure and chaste until marriage, while it is accepted that men should gain sound sexual knowledge before marriage. It is now contentious; some communities still want the circumcision of females in order to restrict their sexual desire, while others authorize early marriage for the girls before they reach puberty (Nwankwo, 1996).

Moreover, the unfaithfulness of a wife is a great crime that not only grants divorce, but in some societies, the family’s rejection also. Thus, a woman who leaves her husband due to his infidelity is normally subjected to derision. Although polygamy is part of the Nigerian culture, it is abnormal for a man to keep only one woman, and a woman is meant to respect and be subordinate to the man she calls her husband. In fact, these cultural practices mingled to guarantee the sustained drawbacks and inferiority of women. Women faced unenthusiastic information about their image and the simplest way to keep away from aggravation and sadness is to descend with the society’s anticipation of them. So, the self-fulfilling prediction on women’s powerlessness to rule is accomplished (Togeby, 1994).

Education

Nigerians received proper education from the early missionaries, who set up schools to train the Catholic clergymen, nuns, and teachers for the early church in the 1900s (Oyekanmi, as cited in Nkechi, 1996).
Early education was copied from the education of the English public school system toward the end of 19th century. At that time, there were fewer schools for girls than boys, and the syllabus for the girls comprised singing, dancing, cooking, and other activities in order to train them to become wives and mothers. Additionally, the stress in missionary education in Nigeria for girls was on character training, marriage training, and domestic affairs. The ratio of girls to boys in that system was tremendously low; for example, in 1920-1925 the ratio of girls to boys in secondary school was 1:35 (Mba, 1992).

Thus, the smaller numbers of females who were receiving any education were intentionally being pushed away from any public life. Many females were not sent to school because it was believed that the best women could do was to become accustomed to the traditional household tasks, for which school was not needed (Nwabueze & Ndukaeze, 1990).

At the higher levels of education, women's chances were few. When Nigerian's first university, the University College of Ibadan, opened in 1948, the admission report said that out of the 104 students admitted, only 3 were females (Nkechi, 1996). Although the situation has significantly improved over the years, and presently, the female population in the universities has grown from the ratio of 1:4 around the 1980s to 2:5 in 1999, women still lag behind, especially in such areas as engineering, medicine, computer science, and chemistry (Oyekanmi as cited in Olorode, 1990).

The Nigerian government has no interest in providing money for education and the missionaries took over the educational focus. The missionary had a fundamental control of the schools, which also served as a means of spreading the gospel. As a result,
women were instilled with religious values for the home and the needy. Most of the early, Nigerian women who went to schools felt compelled to become nurses and teachers. Prejudice became obvious in all aspects of learning, including a leading variety of subjects open to girls, the content of textbooks, and teacher's attitudes. Hence, women were advised to take subjects that corresponded to their domestic roles and men were familiarized toward careers that were inclined to improve their leadership in society (Oyekanmi, 1990).

However, refusing women equal chances in educational and organizational training adds to the inequity of power between the genders. The major heritance of this denial is the inequality with men in the political group, and these groups are mostly men who have sharpened their political skills through career decision-making positions in their areas of work and as various board members (Nwabueze as cited in Olurode, 1990).

Furthermore, access to education and employment are basic components for individuals in a modern Nigerian society if they are to acquire or want to attain political power. Both formal and informal education of individuals allows people to have access to a job or career opportunities that ensure economic control of some resources. These resources, tied to organizational support, build leadership skills and self-esteem. From a psychological point of view, self-esteem enables an individual to attain political power and to use it efficiently when the time comes. Therefore, lacking education and employment to prepare them for public life, women will never be competitive in the modern political society (O’ Barr, 1984).

**Ideological and psychological**
In Nigeria, traditions continue to accentuate the woman's basic roles as mother and housewife. A customary, strong, patriarchal value system favors sexually separated roles, and cultural values count against the progression and participation of women in any political procedure. Nigerian societies are dominated by an ideology about a woman's position. According to their view, women should only play the role of "working mothers" and that is usually low-paid and apolitical. In addition, men can even tell women how to vote and who to vote for.

Women in Nigeria are faced with an ideological situation, one in which a certain common image of women in traditional and political roles continues to overshadow any role they may play. A woman leader image requires that she be genderless in her speech and manner and recognized as a woman only through companionable individuality. Most of the time, it is not acceptable and is even shameful according to the majority, for women leaders to open up their feminine nature (Tibaijuka, 1997).

Tibaijuka noted that the more reliable and "manly" Nigerian women are, the more they are involved with the tacit male systems of the political game. So, Nigerian women politicians had to conquer the complexity of their uncomfortable feelings in the political field. In fact, Nigerian women maintained these ideas and ended up feeling guilty when they could not match this nearly unbearable image. There was a feeling of guilt strongly tied to leadership that made women feel apologetic and that they were betraying their sense of womanhood when they were supposed to be proud of both. Moreover, Nigerian women should know that they never cease to be a woman when they become politicians. Their womanhood can now hold different creative potential and intellectual strength. Women's capabilities to make decisions and to apply them is not a masculine or feminine
specific attribute, but common to all. To be more precise, holding power is natural to man and woman in Nigerian society and worldwide (Tibaijuka, 1997).

Politics as Dirty Game

Historically, Nigerian men controlled all aspects of the political arena; they formulated rules of the political game and described the principles for evaluation. This system of male-dominated ideals results in either women declining to participate in politics or rejecting the male method of politics. Furthermore, Nigerian political life is prearranged in line with male norms, values, and lifestyles. For example, the political ideal is based on "winners and losers, rivalry and opposition instead of mutual respect, teamwork, and agreement. Therefore, the situation is unfamiliar to women, both to their nature and experiences. Therefore, when women do participate in politics, they do so in a small numbers" (Swaraj, 1997, p.2).

In fact, the fundamental nature of the ever-changing political system in Nigeria had been caught up with women’s political participation. For example, the country had been independent for 40 years but the military took control of the government for 27 of those years. However, the meaning of politics in Nigeria made politics a “winner-takes-all” situation, and those in power do not feel compelled to change the lives of the people and the voters. Therefore, elections had been seen as do-or-die business and if people had the impression that once they lost an election they had lost everything, they would definitely do anything to win. So, the rational existence of “electoral frauds, bribery, violence and unnecessary control of money and ethnicity are recognized by every Nigerian as the most horrible problems with politics. Nigerian politics had diminished so much that it generates destructive reactions from opponents and voters, resulting in
political insecurity or unsteadiness. Politics that should be a creative and renewed activity are twisted into a negative profession (Olagunju & Oyovbaire, 1993).

In addition, the lack of money was a woman’s biggest problem. For instance, in July 1991, the National Commission for Women in connection with the Center for Democratic Studies held a one-day meeting with women political aspirants to discuss their problems. Part of the communiqué issued read that as aspirants, “our main problem is lack of finance when compared to our male opponents, but we do not want to get involved in money politics, which we decry” (Nwankwo, 1996, p.71). Women aspirants are minor candidates, insignificant because they usually have no money to mobilize. In addition, because of the most perturbing problem of bribery and political violence, women are scared away from political participation. Again, these political vices provided good reasons for the military takeover the Nigerian government (National Concord, 1991).

**Lack of Party Support**

Nigerian women play significant roles in campaigning and rallying support for their parties, yet they hardly ever occupy decision-making positions in these arrangements. In fact, less than 3% of party leaders in Nigeria are women. Although political parties hold resources for carrying out election campaigns, women do not gain from these resources. For instance, parties do not give enough financial support for women candidates in running their campaigns (IDEA, 1998).

Moreover, both the selection and appointment process within the three political parties in Nigeria is based on a bias against women in that male individualities are stressed and often become the factor in selecting candidates. So, an “old boy club”
ambiance and prejudices hinder and forbid politically inclined women from mixing themselves into their party activity. These consequences make for an underestimation of women as politicians by those who give out money for election campaigns. This prevents women from being nominated. Most of the time, women are placed on the party not to be elected, but to add votes in case their party wins inadequate number of votes in an election. This approach is used as a hook for voters. Women’s participation will be better realized when Nigerian government adopts quotas for women’s participation in politics. (Swaraj, 1998).

**Old Patriarchal Traditions**

Male control over the country’s seat of power and women’s subordination in society and the family were mainly the creation of the European colonizer who brought in patriarchal ideology; instituted a male-dominated state; acknowledged male supremacy in property rights, education and employment, and demoted women’s roles as reproducers in a new gender division of labor (Ruth, 1980).

Consequently, the male dominance in Nigerian decision-making strengthened and spread during the colonial period. Men dominated post-colonial Nigerian politics and politics was used to keep men forever superior to women, creating obstacles to women who sought to obtain the same power and declare themselves within the society. The persistent bias against women in Nigeria is best explained by the idea of patriarchy (Ruth, 1980). Dr. Karam(1997) goes further to explain that “patriarchy is shown in the existing ideology and practices of state and societies and by male control in kinship, family, ownership of property, and the exploitation of women remain a source of benefits for men as head of the family and head of states alike.” (pp.1-4). In fact, the domination of
patriarchy makes it difficult for the women’s movement to exercise influence over the government, which has power to implement policies that would reduce bias against women in Nigeria politics and other public services.

Furthermore, women are subject to the control of their husbands, and unmarried women, divorcees, and widows are in worse positions in terms of properties and power. In Nigeria and most African countries, single females are considered socially unacceptable and are given few rights to own land and other possessions. So, without substantial assets and social acceptance in society, single women find it very difficult to get into politics, while widowed and divorced women are usually subjected to harassment from the former husbands family (Ruth, 1980).

Nigerians still have an understanding of democracy that somehow does not acknowledge that democracy means participation of all groups in society, both men and women. Without quotas by the political parties, lifting women’s representation in Nigerian politics appears difficult. Since 1976, the average percentage of women members in legislature in Nigeria has never increased beyond three to four percent (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1997).

Old patriarchal traditions and quiet restraints are almost certainly the strongest obstacles to increasing women’s representation in Nigerian politics. In Nigeria, there are few women candidates for office and few women are elected. Furthermore, due to misconceptions in Nigerian culture, the belief is that women should only be socially involved in the home, looking after the children, education, and health, whereas men should be the only participants in public affairs, politics, income generation, decision-making and other public functions. Women who risk upsetting these creeds are regarded
as rude and bizarre by their fellow women, who prefer to vote for men as they feel more comfortable with their customary ways of thinking (Karam, 1998).

**Socio-Economic**

The economic crisis and developing democracy in Nigeria have deepened the risk of poverty for women, and unemployment has become more and more feminized. Socio-economic circumstances play an important role in women’s legislative recruitment within both long-standing and new democracies. The lack of similar educational requirements alone means that women cannot vie with men in the job market. In fact, women are not equal to men in any well-paid professional jobs since they are not trained for such jobs (IDEA, 1997). Similarly, most women with jobs are kept in low-paying jobs especially in teaching, healthcare, and service sectors and the rest of the women work as rural farmers, petty traders, and house-wives (Henn, 1994). According to Nkechi Nwankwo (1996):

Those who hold paid jobs find that men in comparable positions within the company get more take-home pay themselves. This is because men are automatically designated as household heads, which entitles them to claim tax relief for dependent children without much ado. The man will also get raises and company loans more easily because he is perceived to need money more than the woman. He is presumed to be running a family while the woman is seen as being supported by a husband (p.67).

Thus, women’s work goes unrewarded, which makes them economically powerless, and men are better placed as they get more money. However, this condition works well for many men, since it forces women to be forever reliant on them and men want to be seen as the economic support of their family. Men are afraid of losing the power to subdue
women’s lives if women no longer need their money. “Women suffer countless social drawbacks from not owning financial power. The irresistible barriers for women going into politics are lack of constituents and lack of monetary resources. Nigerian women move from their father’s homes to their husband’s homes” (Balletbo, 1997, p. 2). They are like refugees and have no foundation from which to develop links with people or to build knowledge and experience about issues. They have no money or land of their own. Everything belongs to their husbands, fathers, or father in-law, and given the increasing cost of running effective political campaigns, this brings another serious obstacle for women in Nigeria (Faiz, 2001).

The Media

The media in Nigeria continues to abuse the image of women, as television, radio, film, newspaper, magazine, and advertisements promote sexist images of women. Nigerian films continue to diminish the lives of women and their bodies and attitudes as some kind of commodities and as evil (Romaniuk, 1996).

In fact, the media should be called the fourth branch of government because of its influence on public opinion and public awareness. The media has two roles to play in Nigerian society: (a) to serve as a watchdog of current events and (b) as a transmitter of information to the public. Most of the time, the media tends to reduce coverage of women’s events and focuses their interests on women’s stereotypes. The media does not sufficiently inform the public about women’s rights and roles in Nigerian society nor does it cover government actions that humanize women’s position in society (Shvedova, 1994).
Furthermore, a woman who wishes to pursue power conflicts with the media image of women, and to solve this disagreement the media would portray the woman as an overly ambitious person who goes beyond her limits. Again, the media sees the woman as man-woman or, in reality, not a woman. In effect, the media reminds women aspirants that their position is in the home with husband and children, and they cannot deal with politics because it is male business (Nwankwo, 1996).

Ultimately, the Nigerian media is used to project gender biases and to promote a stereotype about women’s position in society: it helps the Nigerian public to blame women for problems in the family, including divorce and other minor crimes. Another extensive development in the Nigerian media is to portray women as beautiful objects. In this way, women are recognized by their gender and forced to maintain certain concepts of beauty and pleasant appearance that speak more to women’s physical attributes than to their intellectual sense. Thus, such methods encourage the old patriarchal stereotype of women as the weaker sex, sexual objects, and second-class citizens (Swaraj, 1997).

In Nigeria, the media contributes to women’s obstacles to participating actively in politics. In fact, this occurs through the stereotypical image of women portrayed in the media, the minor coverage given to women’s concerns, under representation in the government, and the low position of women in society.

The Double Burden

In Nigeria, women carry an unequal share of domestic work relative to men and their participation in politics is more restricted by poverty, lack of education, and access to information. It is difficult for women to participate in political life because their main concern is family survival, and they have no choice but to spend much of their time
trying to fulfill their families’ basic needs. However, some women have full-time jobs as wives and mothers as well as other careers like teachers, doctors, and lawyers. To become a member of the legislature in these situations could then be considered a third full-time job. Women are bound to both work and be mothers, but practices endure that make it extremely difficult to combine these roles (Dolling, 1991).

In fact, several obstacles have contributed to the unequal representation of women in the political arena such as culture, education, socio-economics, lack of funds, violence, and the political system in Nigeria. Since the way the affected person sees the problem is usually of more importance than any other views, these women’s views of their obstacles merit a lot of emphasis.

Women and Democracy

If the Nigerian democracy were to be defined and evaluated by, “the stability and effort of improvements guaranteeing the representation and participation of both genders, the word “democracy” would be used with more satisfaction. In addition, the practices and institutions that represent it would be more open in their efforts to reach out” (Ashworth, 1998, p. 8).

However, the process of democracy has just begun in Nigeria. The winds of political change that blew in Nigeria from 1966 to 1998 brought largely the end of military dictatorships and one-party states. “Democracy in Nigeria has offered a new hope for the governance process and the hope of creating democratic cultures with dynamic civil societies and lively and pluralistic media” (Opoku, 1998, p.1).

However, Nigerians have yet to achieve the full liberation of their citizens and the return of civilian government promises new forms of political, economic, and social
governance. The new system of government in Nigeria is imposing new demands on governments to foster a more open society and promote a greater role for women in public decision-making. Democracy affects political, economic, social, and cultural domination. It holds a variety of views and opinions; and it ensures all citizens’ access to and participation in decision-making (Opoku, 1998). Meanwhile, unless women examine the decisions that affect their lives, these decisions are unlikely to be sustainable. Democracy ensures freedom, economic and political expression, and the social well being of every member of the society (Ashworth, 1997).

Consequently, for Nigerians to commit to democracy, women’s political participation should not be limited to supporting men’s political aspirations. In addition men and women would be effectively ensured equal rights, voices, votes, and to be voted for and voting is one-way women may influence the political system.

Women’s participation in political decision-making is still limited and needs expansion if the practice of democracy is to be reliable. The governments and political parties must include women in the political decision-making process, and their concerns must be adequately reproduced or administered if democracy is to be truly participatory. In fact, democracy requires equality, the right to non-discrimination, and the equality of political rights, that is, to elect and to be elected. Nevertheless, only a few women have been elected to hold important decision-making positions in Nigeria. Nigerian democracy calls for equal distribution of private and public responsibilities and a more unbiased presence of men and women in political decision-making bodies. These needs are basic to equalize gender power imbalances and guarantee good control of government (Mensah, 2000).
Chapter III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Population and Sample

Through this study, the author works to analyze the gender inequalities in Nigerian politics. Data were collected by surveys distributed to women in politics at 30 local governments in the three Nigerian states, Imo, Abia, and Enugu. The author chose these areas for the sake of convenience and because the author is familiar with these areas. So, the author was able to distribute the questionnaire with greater ease than in an unfamiliar environment.

The targeted states were selected from a comprehensive report provided by the National Electoral Commission (NEC). Each of the states elected more than one woman into office in the May 29, 1999 election, allowing a minimum of 1 year in office before this study was conducted.

Survey

The survey was distributed on December 26, 2000, to 165 people. Forty-five were collected in person by December 28, 2000, representing a 27.2% return rate. As a follow-up, the author contacted the remaining targeted participants in person, in their various churches, homes, and offices on December 29, 2000, and requested their support and participation.

A total of 75 surveys were completed and returned, which then raised the response rate to 45.5%. The author made the second follow-up contact and the remaining individuals informed her that they were unable to participate due to their tight Christmas schedules, their limited interest in politics, or personal preference. All targeted
participants were assured complete confidentiality and were not required to reveal their identities or that of their political parties.

Data Collection

In collecting data for this study, the survey was designed such that the key areas of research are clearly addressed by the author and the respondents. In this regard, the survey is a general survey, and questions are mainly in a multiple-choice format. The author's aim was to assist the respondents in identifying the primary focus of the research and to make the survey easier for them.

The questions focused on the general knowledge of how Nigerian society feels or reacts to women participating in politics. These data were important as it helped the author to identify the attitudes or opinions of Nigerians pertaining to women entering into political power.
Chapter IV

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

Based on the literature research and some experience of Nigerian politics, the author had several expectations as to what these data would reveal. Among these was the assumption that the primary motivation for political women would be to improve political instability in Nigeria. This assumption stemmed from Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) coverage on the issue, indicating that women all over the world were struggling politically. Additionally, because Margaret Ekpo stressed the importance of women's participation in Nigerian politics, the author anticipated that most of the respondents would have participated actively in Nigerian elections. Finally, the author assumed that when asked about Nigerian's responses toward women's participation in politics, most would indicate that their culture was against the integration.

While the data unveiled the accurate answers to these questions, it also revealed other relevant information regarding gender inequalities in Nigerian politics. Of the 75 respondents, 35 represented Abia State, which has a population ranging from 20,000 to 30,000 people. The other two were Imo and Enugu State, with populations of 25,000 and 35,000, respectively. The number of women elected/appointed in government ranged from 1 to 10, in both federal and state government.

Of the participating states, each elected at least one woman in different branches of government. It is obvious that some of the respondents are interested in
politics. In this regard, a comparison of answers between the political women would have been a valuable contribution to the research. However, in an effort to ensure confidentiality, the author did not request the names of the participants.

Data Review

As indicated in Table 1, the author assumed that the primary obstacle that hinders women in politics is financial instability. Of the 75 respondents, 17 indicated that the Nigerian culture remained a hindrance, while 35 suggested that the political parties should give enough financial support for women candidates in running their campaigns. Seven indicated that old patriarchy contributed to the undermining of women in politics. Still nine others provided their own reasons. Their responses included the need for efficiency and improvement of Nigerian political system, especially against political bribery and corruption. The last noted that all of the offered responses came into play in giving women the opportunity to high education.
Table 1

Primary Obstacles for Women in Politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Patriarch</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Corruption</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Two participants did not indicate any response to this question.

All respondents commented that women are underrepresented in Nigerian decision-making and in society in general. This is not surprising because the literature stresses the factors that undermine women's role in public life. It is evident the data on women's perception of the obstacles to women in politics that Nigerians are not placing enough value on women's participation in politics and the author assumed that, this could be contributing to the mismanagement of the country economy. To give women an opportunity to participate in decision-making may prove to play a key role in reforming the Nigerian government, however it is difficult to know the true effect on women's involvement.
This data is consistent with literature and research about the status of women in Nigerian politics. Table 2 provides an overview of the participants’ responses to women political interest.

Table 2

Responses to Political Interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Five participants did not indicate any response to this question.

Table 2 provides an overview of the participants’ responses to their attitudes towards politics. As noted, 45.6% of the respondents were interested in politics. Ironically, most of the respondents belong to one political party or another. Hence, the author anticipated that Nigerians have not shown enough interest and support to women who have attempted to contest an election, in comparison to a situation in which the society was not hesitant or against women’s circumcision.

Regardless, the federal and the state governments were not insightful enough to implement effective policy and express an interest in their constituents’ support to ensure equal participation of women in politics. As indicated in the literature, women’s participation in political decision-making is essential if the practice of democracy is be reliable.
Table 2 also shows that 28% of the respondents reported no interest in politics and would never consider running for election. While the representation of women in Nigerian politics is limited, they still demonstrated an interest in maintaining their constituents’ support in their political parties. The author points out that the representatives from the three states that indicated “Neutral” were not supportive of women’s participation in the Nigerian politics, however, one of the local government officials noted that men were “hesitant.”

Five participants did not answer this question. Once again, the author cannot confirm that these respondents did not acknowledge women’s participation in the decision-making, however the absence of a response leads to that assumption. Regardless, comments clearly reveals that local government officers in Abia State are encouraging women to participate in politics.

The final area of the data collection was based on the specific effects of political fairness between men and women in Nigerian politics. The literature provided limited statistics in this regard and it is here that the author relied on definitive results.

Table 3

Responses to Political Fairness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note. Two participants did not indicate any response to this question. As indicated in table 3 there is no fairness in the Nigerian politics. However, 64% of the respondents agreed that there is inherent gender bias favoring men in Nigerian politics. Slightly more than 13% indicated that Nigerians shared their political issues equally and 8% of the participants were Neutral.

Many respondents commented that it was important to educate the Nigerian citizens and advise it that women have a potential and public life could be made better by their participated in politics. The majority of respondents felt that it was imperative that women be given a chance and their contributions would be beneficial to the society. In this regard, this research is consistent with the literature. Nwankwo (1996) “advocated a deliberate policy of equal gender representation in Nigerian politics and public life as the only way of ensuring a stable and enduring political system and progress in society” (p.1).

In the survey, participants were asked if they would vote for a woman as a president. The data revealed that 70% of the participants would not vote for a woman as president or governor of a state. This is disheartening because the Nigerian society should work out the most equitable means of harmonizing the diverse energies and talents of its womenfolk. Nigerian’s prejudice, low level of education, and various complexes will continue to influence the way women and men perceive their roles. Given the fact men have benefited tremendously from these skewed arrangements, many of which have been reinforced by colonialism, tradition, and religion, it will be difficult to eliminate them. In fact, Nigerians must find a way to address the problem of inequality in the political
system. Four respondents left this question blank. The author is left to wonder if they did not understand the question.

It is disappointing to the author that the data suggests that, the perceived role of a woman was still a combination of the traditional and religious worldviews: women are to be seen not heard. Women were important only to the extent that they merely complemented their husbands’ successes or position in society. This trend has dominated the interaction between women and society, which explains why the role of women was seen as largely ceremonial, supportive, and complementary.

Another series of survey questions focused on media attitude and fairness in most of its coverage of political issues. A total of 58% of the participants indicated that the media had not been supportive and continues to contribute at the same level or a greater level to women’s stereotypes. Of these respondents, the majority has had to deal with the media on one issue or another, and 22.6% reported disagreed and neutral.

The author believes it is understandable, Nigerian culture makes it a woman’s duty to the home and care for children.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women Political Future</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>56.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note. Two participants did not indicate any response to this question.

Table 4 reveals a full range of political outcomes. Similarly, when compared to the respondents’ profile, interest, and fairness, the author found that there is no absolute answer when it comes to the women’s future in Nigeria politics.

A total of 56.1% disagreed when asked if the past and present system of politics in Nigeria promises great hope for women in the future. A total of 34.2% agreed and 3.5% indicated neutral. Similar, results were found concerning the question of whether there needs to be more women in elected position. Forty-five percent or greater disagreed to the question. One state had five or more women in the state legislative body and women were actively involved in the state decisions-making.

Additionally, these data revealed that women were presently perceived as effective political representatives. Eighty percent of the respondents indicated that women are effective political representatives, while 10% disagreed and 3.5% neutral were neutral.

The data supports Rule comment (1981), “women are equal to and have the same potential as men, but only they can fight for their rights (p.45).

The final survey asked whether women in Nigerian politics, past and present make a significant impact in Nigerian government. Only 10% of the participants stated that women had made political contributions to the Nigerian society. However, the majority of the respondents stressed an increase of women in Nigerian politics. Similarly, some commented that women should be given a chance to handle the public affairs. Others noted that women could make better leader.
This data is not only discouraging to the author as a Nigerian, but reveals a somewhat grim future for Nigerian women in politics. One cannot help but wonder what will lie ahead for Nigerians if the political system is faced with even greater challenges in securing women in decision-making body. Will Nigerian perception about women change?

The data suggests that politics in Nigeria is changing. While there is not enough conclusive evidence to verify what happens to women after elected into office, there are certainly successful women in political positions. The most consistent finding generated from this research is that women are perceived as effective political representatives and women have ability to make a significant impact in Nigerian government.
Chapter V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the onset of her research the author sought to learn how inequality in Nigerian politics affects women. Through a comprehensive review of the literature and implementation of a study of three states, it was found that it is difficult to draw specific conclusion about the political future of Nigerian women. However, women’s greater presence in the workforce, public life, and the political decision-making process, on equal basis with men, will continue to be a problem as long as the costs continue to burden to the Nigerian society.

Both the literature and data revealed the underrepresentation of women in Nigerian politics. Nigeria should grant women all the rights they need: political, legal, economic, and social rights. The research indicates that finance is a major problem confronting women in politics, since women do not have right to own property and they are account as property to their husbands or family. Similarly, most of the participants have been or interest in politics. However, the majority of the respondents commented on the poor representation of women in Nigerian politics.

Although, the conclusions from the research and data are not definitive, the author provides some recommendations to Nigerian women facing this political challenge. Most importantly, political women need a women’s union. In the past, women were able to achieve their aims through a unionized action. They should be able to attract and sustain media support as a group. Again, education and employment of women is key to achieve balanced representation of women in politics. In addition, employment gives some of the financial security required for politics and helps women to gain experience dealing with
people outside their homes. Nigerian culture should be modified to accommodate women in politics and public life by treating male and female children equally. That would help to set an acceptable behavior and gender roles in the society.

Additionally, the mass media can work towards ensuring women’s active involvement and participation in the country’s social and economic development. Women on the other hand can learn how to deal with and get best media coverage as a groups or individuals. Women need to arrange with the media to plan educational and enlighten program for different groups of women and sections of public.

Future Study

A future study might focus on the impact of women in the Nigerian government.

In closing, it is the author’s belief that if a follow-up survey were to be conducted in future years results that are more conclusive would be revealed. It may be too early in the political process to determine the specific effects of women in Nigerian politics. For women the challenge is just beginning and equal representation is yet to occur. For some communities, they are still ironing out the culture and old patriarchy of including women in the decision-making process.
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