

CULTURAL NORMS, POLICY FRAMEWORKS, AND THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Nigerian political landscape has been characterized by gender bias, a trend that intensified after 1999, undermining the democratic principle of inclusivity. This study examines the factors driving the politics of exclusion in contemporary Nigeria by analyzing participants' perspectives through a quantitative methodology. Findings indicate that cultural beliefs significantly disadvantage women in political participation. Additionally, ineffective implementation of domestic and international gender equality policies contributes to women's limited political relevance. Other factors, including poor education and limited support for women in local and national politics, were found to have less impact. The study recommends comprehensive sensitization programs, particularly targeting men, to promote the inclusion of women in politics. It also calls for interventions by government agencies and political parties to ensure gender balance and strengthen democratic governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Gender, Political exclusion, Culture, Nigeria, Women

Introduction

A push for equal participation in politics has made Nigeria consider national and international treaties to guarantee equity and freedom from segregation in national politics. Owoeye (2021) claims that the Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution provides for political parity. It promoted active participation at all levels of government, political equality, and freedom from discrimination, among other things. According to Owoeye (2021), apart from the constitutional provisions, other national documents have been put in place in the country to encourage women's political participation for achieving a fair and gender-neutral society in which both men and women make significant contributions to and gain from overall national growth.

Comparable to this, the main thrust of those initiatives is to create a society in which everyone irrespective of gender, religion, or cultural beliefs can profit from shared privileges, rights, and responsibilities (National Gender Policy, 2006). But regrettably, in many situations when gender disparity occurs, women appear to be marginalized or excluded when it comes to making decisions and having access to national governance, and other benefits; like financial resources, among other things (Lawal & Ojo, 2006).

In addition, ever since the Fourth Republic of Nigeria was established in 1999, there has been a growing chorus of advocates for women's participation and representation in politics through legislation and policy initiatives. This concerted and relentless effort eventually paid off, as the government was able to come up with a policy document aimed at reducing gender disparity notably the National Gender Policy established by an act of parliament in 2006.

In contrast, Lawal & Ojo (2006) bemoaned the fact that women are a socially disadvantaged group everywhere, but the situation in Nigeria is particularly concerning since political discrimination against women is starting to become commonplace in the nation's political sphere. According to scientific data, Nigeria performed poorly in terms of political representation and participation—29 percent— when compared to men, who scored 71 percent (Owoeye, 2021). Nigeria came in fifth place globally in this situation.

Luka (2011) attributed the issue of women's underrepresentation and unequal involvement to other women. He maintained that women are unaware of their numerical power, which could have given them influence in the political system. Based on statistics and the results of the 2006 National Population Census, women made up half of the population.

In a similar spirit, it is crucial to emphasize that women represent a vital national resource whose innovative ideas, caring for the unity of the social fabric, and innovative problemsolving skills can influence both the general quality of life and society. They must participate in national politics to accomplish this admirable goal. For example, deliberate and determined steps have been made and put into action in various countries to give gender equality in political involvement opportunities.

According to Agbalajobi (2010), Nigerian women's unrealized potential and capacity could improve governance and spur the expansion and development of democracy. For example, the United States of America, which is the model for democratic government, has come a long way in the last few decades to enact laws that have increased women's participation and representation in American electoral democracy, thereby addressing feminine issues and raising the number of women in the legislature. (Ajayi, 2022).

Inclusion is a key component of democracy, in addition to the idea that everyone should have equal opportunities to participate in national governance, regardless of gender (Asirvatham & Misra, 2012). In light of this, Owoeye (2021) asserted that not all democratic nations are truly democratic in practice, given the absence of fundamental democratic ideals like equal representation, which Nigeria has yet to achieve. Furthermore, according to Diamond's classification of democratic ideologies, democracy is not discriminatory and rather encourages egalitarianism, particularly in national administration, which is antidiscrimination in both intent and effect. Due to the aforementioned, several nations have adopted universal suffrage, allowing all adults, regardless of gender, to participate in electoral democracy (Diamond, 1987).

Given the glaringly low presence of women in politics, it is acknowledged that much depends on attaining the broad and aspirational goals of ensuring gender parity in national politics (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010; Ngara & Ayabam, 2013; Owoeye, 2021). Therefore, the overarching focus of this study is to interrogate the key drivers of the politics of exclusion in Nigeria.

Historisation of Gender Issues in Nigeria

Historically, although women's political participation has improved, Ikpe (2004) lamented that they still play a relatively small role in Nigeria's politics. As ethnicity, sexism, and personality-driven politics took hold in both politics and parties during the postindependence era, women's involvement in politics suffered. Ikpe (2004) claimed that politics during the classical era was mostly based on ethnicity, with no regard for the goals and needs of women. Gender camaraderie was supplanted by party and ethnic loyalty as women's group power, which was a key component of the colonial era agitations, was lost in Nigerian politics (Anifowose, 2004).

For example, Sulaiman (2017) remarked that only two women served in the federal parliament's Senate and three did so in the Eastern House of Assembly from 1960 to 1965. In the entire nation, four female legislators were given the necessary platform in women's favour. Beginning in 1966, the military era discouraged women from participating in politics and made little to no reference to women in positions of authority. Military leadership can be characterized as an alpha male control, and throughout that time, women were only permitted to play limited roles (Agbalajobi, 2009; Owoeye, 2021).

Continuing, following the division of Nigeria into 12 states in 1967, two female appointees served as commissioners in the states of Oyo and East Central, respectively. The absence of female delegates according to Anifowose and Elemuo (1999) from Obasanjo's Constituent Assembly in 1975, which happened under a military regime with little to no regard for constitutional stake equilibrium, disrupted the operation of women's organizations as pressure groups, because these centers were prohibited. When the government was handed up to civilians, women were not given much attention. Even though no women were appointed to the fifty-member Constitutional Drafting Committee during the Murtala/Obasanjo administration, Mrs. Janet Akinrinade was elected to the Constituent Assembly (Ikpe, 2004). In the 1976 local government council elections, few women were chosen, and none were chosen to join the fifty-member Constitutional Drafting Committee. Four were selected from among the 250 assembly members.

Observably, there had been no significant disparities in women's participation in electoral politics and engagement in the Second Republic, amid increased efforts to provide them with opportunity to participate in national advancement (Abubakar & Ahmed, 2014). Although women made great strides in 1979 toward participating in representative politics, there were still barriers due to their minimal representation in the federal legislative, and the States House of Assembly. Out of the 96 senators and 11 of the 450 members of the lower chambers, there were around three ministers and one senator who were female (Ikpe, 2004).

Additionally, women were not represented in the 19 state legislatures, and they were also missing in both the executive and legislative arms of the local government (Anifowose, 2004). In the two years after the collapse of the Nigerian Second Republic, women once more lost prominence in the Nigerian political space. As a result of the military's minimal but noticeable appointment of women into national positions of authority in the middle of the 1980s, the military regime of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida embarked on a mission of gender equality as he pushed for the appointment of women into leadership position across the level of government in 1985. Remarkably, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida's introduction of "First Lady Syndrome" is a phenomenon that significantly contributed to the prominence of women in politics. Under this aegis, Better Life for Rural Women was founded; the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) was subsequently rechristened by the First Lady (Ikpe, 2004; Iloh & Ikenna, 2009)).

Going forward, only 181 of the 11, 881 positions available nationwide in the general elections were won by women during the 1999 elections in Nigeria, marking the beginning of their minimal participation in the political process (Iloh & Ikenna, 2009). Women made up 6.3% of those elected to the national legislature, but just five (4.6%) of the 109 senators elected to the Senate and thirteen (3.6%) of the 360 members elected to the House of Representatives. There were no female candidates for any of the 36 governorships. The only female deputy governor in Lagos State from 1999 to 2003 was Chief Kofoworola Akerele-Bucknor, and women held 12 (1.21 percent) of the 990 seats in the State House of Assembly. At the local level, 143 of the 8,700 councilors and 9 of the 774 local government chairpersons were female (Ikpe, 2004).

Notwithstanding initiatives to enhance women's political participation, there was little change in the 2003 elections. 21 (6.1%) of the 339 House of Representatives seats were gained by women in the 2003 elections. In addition, only 3 (2.7%) of the 109 senatorial seats were held by women, making up 8.8% of the assembly (Anifowose, 2004). There was no any women representation at the state executive, as there was no single female governor in all the (36) states that were open, and only 38 (or 3.84 percent) of the 990 seats in the States House of Assembly were held by women.

In the House of Representatives, where there are 358 members, 25 (6.9%) of the seats were won by women; in the Senate, there are 109 seats; 9 (8.3%) were won by women. This is equivalent to 7.3% of both the Senate and House of Representatives being women. At the state level, 54 of the 990 seats in the State House of Assembly (or 5.5% of the total) were up for election, while none of the 36 gubernatorial slots were elected (Iloh & Ikenna, 2009).

In the elections held in April 2007, there were 7160 candidates, with 628 women making up 8.8% of the field, according to information from the Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC). 209 or 6.7% of the 3141 candidates for National Assembly seats (799 for the Senate and 2342 for the House of Representatives) were female (59 or 7.4% for the Senate and 150 or 6.4%), corresponding to 2%, 4%, and 6% representation in 1999, 2003, and 2007 respectively (Ikpe, 2004).

Comparatively, and against the backdrop of previous experiences, this shows an increase in the level of women in political positions. This occurred at the instance of the Obasanjo government's positive attempts to include women in political administration, which led to the waiving for women of the payment of preregistration charges for political aspirants by political parties (Agablajobi, 2009). The preelection perks given to women within the period marked an unbelievable watershed in the history of the country's electoral democracy, as women were seen taking part in intra-party democracy, even with limited electoral victory (Owoeye, 2021).

To expand the number of women actively involved in Nigerian politics, many local, regional, and international bodies engaged in wider sensitization programs aimed at encouraging women's participation in politics. Other organizations and NGOs focused on issues of gender, and gender balancing in elective and appointive positions. Women's level of participation in the 2007 general election remained low as usual and did not represent a marked difference from others (Okoye & Okoli, 2022).

However, when juxtaposed with men and when considering the international benchmark of 30– 35% affirmative action, women's representation and participation in Nigeria's political space was not encouraging and remained negligible (Dahleup, 2013). In Nigeria's April 2011 elections for the National Assembly, only 9% of candidates were women. This is far less than South Africa and Rwanda, where women had established a formidable prominence and stamped their feet on the country's electoral democracy. Women in South Africa and Rwanda according to Owoeye (2021) won elections into the parliament in very large numbers through competitive elections.

The situation is almost the same in the 2015, 2019, and 2023 general elections in Nigeria, with limited and poor women representation, especially in the national parliament. Only a handful of women gained appointment positions at the federal and state executive councils. Sadly, no female state governors have ever been elected in Nigeria's history; instead, six deputy governors (from the states of Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Imo, Plateau, and the Anambra) have held such positions (Dahleup, 2013). This raises doubts about the idea that democracy would lead to a boost in women's political participation (Diamond, 1997).

Study Objectives

The overall focus of this study is to re-evaluate the performance of the National Gender Policy concerning women's participation in politics since 2006. However, the research is aimed at achieving the stated objectives;

1. To determine the drivers of politics of exclusion in Nigeria
2. To interrogate the cultural and policy aspects of the issue

Research Design (Hybrid Method)

The research engaged a statistical analysis that describes in detail the responses gotten from the participants to extract data among Nigerian women on the main matters raised. This statistical analysis is relevant in that its ability

to gather firsthand information about a voluminous human population to note directly as well as essential for ascertaining behaviour, perceptions, and beliefs in a huge population (Babbie, 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012; Haralambos & Holborn, 2013). Therefore, this design helped the researchers interrogate the drivers of the politics of exclusion in Nigeria.

Study Area

The population of the study is Abuja Municipal (AMAC), Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja. This is a local government that serves as host to a large majority of women who are resident in Abuja. The Federal Capital Territory is located in central Nigeria and serves as the capital city of Nigeria. The FCT was formed in 1976 and extracted from parts of the old states of Plateau, Kwara, Kaduna, and Niger states respectively. With major landmass brought out of Niger state. The military regime of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida made the physical relocation of the Nigeria federal capital from Lagos to Abuja, on the 12th of December, 1991. The population of this study is chronicled as 360,347 females according to population census figures enumerated in the 2006 National Population Commission Census in Abuja Municipal (AMAC) FCT, Abuja (NPC, 2010).

Data Analysis

The important variables' variability and correlations between them were examined and compared using both descriptive and inferential statistics in the study. Simple percentages and measures of central tendency were used as descriptive statistics tools. The statistics on the drivers of political discrimination among women were explained using the measures of central tendency. To answer questions about the respondents' demographics, simple percentages were used.

As determined by summing the values (1+2+3+4+5) divided by 5, the cutoff point for the average mean value of all items on the scales was established at 3.00. As a result, for the analysis, any item with a mean value less than 3.00 was regarded as low, while any item with a mean value greater than 3.00 was deemed high. The multiple standard regression statistic (R²) was used to analyze how respondents' demographic traits affected how much they participated in politics.

In addition, a Factor Analysis (FA) was used to address the question bordering on the policy and cultural issue of the subject matter. The aim of this parametric tool (FA) was to identify a small set of factors that best explains the underlying relationships and variations among some groups of variables. The IBM software (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences [SPSS 23.0]) was employed to aid the analysis of the data. Statistical inference was made with at least a 5% probability level.

Results and Interpretation

Analysis of the data collected was presented in this section. Of the entire 400 questionnaires that were administered to respondents through the unitality of the Taro Yamani formula, only 348 (87%) came back. The 87% feedback rate was regarded as modest however, a suitable analysis was performed to answer the major study questions.

Research objective one: to determine the drivers of politics of exclusion in Nigeria

The table shows the motivators of political discrimination against women in Nigeria

Indicators	M	SD	Decision
Lack of support among women	4.33	0.21	Accept
Insufficient education	2.48	1.78	Reject
Financial issue	2.00	1.97	Reject
Yes, internal-party problem	4.08	0.10	Accept
Inferiority complex among women	3.78	1.77	Accept

Table 1 reveals the statistical summary. This high level of discrimination based on lack of demonstrates that the participants were edged support and internal party subjugation among out in political participation because of a lack others. On the other hand, the results indicated of adequate support from their fellow women. that respondents generally were not well and This shows a significant value of 4.33 + 0.21 properly enlightened on the potential need to and 4.08 + 1.77, respectively, and the weighted increase women's opportunities to participate in mean of items of internal party discrimination. national politics. The average score was higher than the 3.00 Research objective two: to interrogate the limit, indicating that the participants showed a cultural and policy aspects of the subject matter

Table 2. Showing the role of culture and policy in the political discrimination against women

Highlighting the cultural and policy	M	SD	Decision issues
Women are underrepresented in political	4.54	1.31	Accept leadership positions, due to cultural orientation
The laws are there, but women are often Suppressed	3.41	0.91	Accept
In actuality, women have even opportunity as their opposite sex	2.13	1.88	Reject

The political space is often populated by un-Supportive men	4.31	1.26	Accept
Realistically, the policies enhance women's political involvement	2.19	2.00	Reject
Proper and regular sensitization is crucial for the policy to thrive	3.64	0.02	Accept
Sensitization against cultural beliefs would make them Succeed in politics	1.22	2.92	Reject

Table 2 shows the arithmetical summary of the level of compliance with some national and global Policies. For example, women were considered as shortchanged and relegated politically above their opposite sex i.e., men. For instance, in consonance with the table, women were being discriminated against in electoral democracy (4.54+1.31), the laws are there, but women are always suppressed by the menfolk (3.41+0.91), in practice, men have more political opportunity than women especially in Nigeria as shown in the study (2.13+1.88). Nonetheless, the outcome reveals women sampled in the study agreed to the awareness of both national and international initiatives (policies) aimed at closing gender disparity in politics, but the lack of proper implementation has hindered those initiatives.

This result is in line with previous research (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010; Luka, 2011; Ihemeje, 2013) demonstrating the poor level of policy implementation.

The study contributes to the body of literature regarding the extent of the lack of commitment to national policies in Nigeria has existed among the sampled women, even though it failed to deal with gender differences in consciousness of events in the Nigerian electoral democracy. The findings also reveal the nature of internal politics in Nigeria. Studies have shown that women are often subjugated among political parties in the country, especially the dominant ones. It was further noted that the inferiority complex is a major driver of the politics of exclusion in Nigeria. The majority of the participants lament their unskillfulness compared to men in terms of political activism. This factor is further connected to the increasing level of illiteracy among women, particularly in the local areas.

The results also revealed that women were seen as being politically less advantaged than men. The study claims that this is because women were underrepresented in politics since there was not a supportive atmosphere for women to succeed in electoral politics. The results further showed that female failed to have the same opportunities as their male counterparts. The behaviour and ideas of women regarding political engagement are likely to continue to be shaped by this emphasis on a norm that favors men over

women. According to data, females displayed a huge lack of interest in politics and desire to contest for political office in comparison to menfolk, and have lower political ambitions (Owoeye, 2021).

The elements that continue to support these views and ultimately prevent women from actively participating in electoral politics in Nigeria were also noted. In consonance with participants, factors that affected the effective actualization of the policy among others included a deficit of strong government support, a declined rate of women's access to jobs and good education, superior disposition of men and sexism, age, and crisis at voting period, and many more. The results support past findings that either of the variables mentioned above was to blame for the low levels of political involvement among women in their various samples (e.g., Agbalajobi, 2010; Okoli, Okoye, et al, 2022). Furthermore, the patriarchal system, as well as social-cultural, economic, educational, and political issues, continue to prevent women from holding positions important positions in government that would showcase their leadership potential.

Conclusion

Women who participated in the study's sample lamented the negative and unsupportive attitude of their fellow women in national politics in

Nigeria which has significantly contributed to women's exclusion in national politics. The greedy nature of men to continuously present themselves as party flagbearers for juicy political office was also implicated as a major driver of gender discrimination in Nigeria. This revelation has prevented women from occupying the exalted positions of state governors, and the president of the country. The poor level of policy execution aimed at addressing gender imbalance in Nigeria has affected women's political participation. The study observed the cultural beliefs that women should be in a subservient status in the scheme of things as a major factor that has led to women's exclusion from political participation in the country. An intentional sensitization programme against cultural beliefs hindering women's political participation, truth, and honest commitment to national and international initiatives encouraging women's political participation is strongly recommended in this study.

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