

GENDER, POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE REPRODUCTION OF PATRIARCHY IN NIGERIA

A Reflection on the Democratisation Process, 1999-2011

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ABSTRACT

This article examines issues of women's involvement in party politics in Nigeria against the background of the 2011 general elections. It explores the influence of patriarchal disposition on women's participation as well as the extent (or otherwise) to which women are respected and accepted as equal stakeholders in democratic politics and party decision-making organs. It shows that the marginalisation of women defies legal and constitutional guarantees and must be tackled simultaneously with patriarchy by the following means: establishing continuous dialogue between women and men leaders, increasing women's participation in local elections, endorsing and entrenching a quota system/mechanism in national and political party constitutions, reviewing electoral systems and adopting those most conducive to women's participation (for example, proportional representation). Political parties should establish legal funds to enable women politicians to challenge electoral malpractices in court.

INTRODUCTION

Not only do women make up about half the voting population of Nigeria, as they do in most African countries, but most Nigerian women, like those in most of Africa, have had the right to vote since independence. The question is not whether women have the right to vote, but whether their positions, organisations or attempts to influence the quality of their lives by political means are seen to be part of the process of democratic politics or democratisation.

'Including "women" as actors in a narrative of democracy and democratization is, on the most basic level, a question of equity and what "democracy" stands for' (Van Allen 2001, pp 40-41). To include women in the narrative at this level

means asking whether any, some, many women are able to act as 'citizens', who have some stake in, understanding of, and effect on political decision making, or whether they are only 'subjects', whose relationship to the government is one of loyalty and dependence in exchange for paternalistic care for their welfare.

Mamdani (1996) suggests that 'women' as a class might be considered 'subjects' rather than 'citizens' in Africa and uses gender as a category in examining particular movements, laws, policies, and so on and the exclusion of women from political rights as a negative criterion in evaluating political systems. Similarly, feminists have argued that women are kept out of politics by a series of powerful conventions that distinguish sharply between public and private; a separation that greatly curtails 'the range and content of public affairs and has consigned to the private all the supposedly petty concerns of ordinary life' (Phillips 1991, p 4).

Be that as it may, what is the basic minimum below which no political system must fall if it is to describe itself as democratic? How far can we ignore this minimum and still retain the democratic ideal? The minimum that most people would identify with is that governments should be freely and fairly elected and all adults should have an equal right to vote. This minimum is, itself, a recent achievement, even in older democracies like Britain, where it was not until 1928 that women over 21 gained the right to vote on the same basis as men. It is more recent still in Nigeria. Although universal franchise was granted to Southern women in the mid-1950s, it was not until 1976 that women were allowed to vote in Northern Nigeria. An important factor inhibiting women's participation in Northern Nigeria is the *purdah* system (house seclusion of women).

Participatory democracy challenges the distinction between public and private realms, arguing that 'if democracy matters in the state, it matters just as much, if not more, elsewhere' Phillips (1991, p 16). Having lowered its sights to reasonable representation and occasional popular control liberal democracy has proved to be resistant to substantial representation of women and, in most democracies, the number of women elected remains abysmally low. As Phillips (1991, p 19) notes, in a small minority of countries the past three decades have brought major changes in the representation of women; in others there has merely been a bit more (or even less). The growing gap between the Nordic countries and the rest of Europe and the United States is striking, as it is between African countries like Rwanda, Uganda and South Africa and the rest of Africa.

The inability of the Nigerian state to conduct credible elections has been attributed to the long period of military rule, weak democratic institutions and processes and a host of other historical factors, which have led to the emergence of a political culture characterised by election violence, monetised politics, low accountability, abuse of power, general apathy about elections and low participation of critical segments of the society, especially women (Irabor 2011).

Women constitute at least half of Nigeria's population. They make important and largely unacknowledged contributions to economic life and play crucial roles in all spheres of society. Despite this they are discriminated against in the political process and their marginalisation is most pronounced in the democratisation processes. Women in Nigeria hold less than 8% of important decision-making positions. The present National Assembly has an inexcusably low number of women in both houses. Despite Nigeria's long history of political parties, very few Nigerian women have been either elected or appointed to party office. The passive participation of women in the nation's political parties and policymaking bodies suggests that Nigerian society, like most other societies, is strongly patriarchal.

Patriarchy affects gender relations, as is evidenced in almost all spheres of activity, notably with regard to decision making, access to education, health status and access to and control of resources. As is the case in most African countries, men in Nigeria are generally responsible for decision making and women's rights are limited. This affects women's power to influence the nation's public policies.

The essential questions, therefore, are: how gender sensitive is the nature of democracy in Nigeria and why have Nigerian women not been able to break into the machinery of political parties? Central to this discussion is the question of the level of participation women can exercise in party politics, particularly if participation is framed in terms of standing for political office.

A typical Nigerian woman is socialised in a culture of female subordination. She is not only subordinate to her husband and to the men in her own family but also to all members of her husband's family (male and female). Historically, the kinship structures have placed men in a position of advantage. Patriarchy in Nigeria subordinates women and makes them vulnerable. Various institutions of society such as family, religion, the law, politics, education, economics, media, socio-cultural practices and state policies and agency have further perpetrated the subjugation and disempowerment of women.

With the conclusion of the 2011 general elections it is therefore imperative that we review and redefine the framework for the enlargement of the political space for women. Against this setting, this article examines issues of women's involvement in politics in Nigeria. It explores the extent to which Nigerian women participate in party politics, the impact of patriarchy on women's participation as well as the extent (or otherwise) to which women are respected and accepted as equal stakeholders in the democratisation project.

PARTRIACHY, GENDER, POLITICAL PARTIES AND DEMOCRACY

Patriarchy is a social system in which the role of the man, as the main authority person, is fundamental to social groups and associations. It is a social construct

passed down from generation to generation and most pronounced in societies with traditional cultures and less economic development (Sanderson 2001; Macionis 2000). Patriarchy is best defined as control by men of a disproportionately large share of power. In a patriarchal system fathers hold authority over women, children, and property. It implies the institutions of male rule and privilege and is dependent on female subordination. Patriarchy explains how societies control women, who must constantly fight for their rights and sometimes struggle just to survive without being threatened by the power and domination of men. As Carole Pateman (1988) notes, 'The patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection.'

According to Hartman (1997), patriarchy is a set of social relations which has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men and solidarity among them which enables them to dominate women. Hartman goes on to explain that the material base of patriarchy is men's control over women's labour power, a control maintained by excluding women from access to necessary economically productive resources and reducing their sexuality.

In feminist theory, the concept of patriarchy often includes all the social mechanisms that reproduce and exert male domination over women. Most forms of feminism characterise patriarchy as an unjust social system that is oppressive to women (Tickner 2001). Radical feminists emphasise the patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women and think that society is an oppressive patriarchy that primarily oppresses women. Put differently, they emphasise the social domination of women by men.

Radical feminists perceive patriarchy as dividing rights, privileges and power to the disadvantage of women. Thus they view it as the root cause of most serious social problems and are sceptical of political action within the prevalent social system. For a radical feminist, '[m]ales and males only are the originators, planners, controllers, and legitimators of patriarchy' (Daly 1978).

Patriarchal theory observes that not only are women controlled by dominant men using aggressive hierarchical social power, they are also controlled by non-dominant men. Moreover, according to this theory, while the man is more often than not the dominant party, the exploited party is generally the woman. This contention is validated in Nigeria, where the marginalisation of women has become standard practice in the political system. Indeed, '[t]he evolution of women's participation in party politics presents a pattern, where women are often pushed to certain positions that are in reality practically and strategically redundant' (Akiyode-Afolabi & Arogundade 2003, p 44).

According to historical records, despite the fact that pre-colonial Nigeria was patriarchal, women were not entirely left out of the political system (Awe 1989).

Generally, women's political power varied from one place to another; while in some societies women shared responsibilities with men; in others, their roles were complementary or subordinate. Successful women had access to political power on merit and, in several communities, women emerged as leaders or rulers. This political set-up changed significantly during the colonial era. Women were ignored by the colonial authorities in the eventual redistribution of positions and power and the marginalisation of women became standard practice.

In spite of being constrained by the repressive colonial state, women activists in Southern Nigeria engaged in vigorous struggles against the violation of their interests and those of their communities. Before independence in 1960 Nigerian women, through movements led by great women like Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Margaret Ekpo and others, questioned the colonialists' arbitrary manner of governance and their socioeconomic policies. The response of women activists to the colonial programme 'was tailored to the demands of the political systems that were imposed on them, hence the confrontations between local despots and women who resisted marginalization' (Okome 2001).

The marginalisation of women during the colonial era was behind the earliest mass protest movement in Eastern Nigeria, the 1925 Nwaobiola movement, which culminated in the famous Aba women's riots (or war). Women in Western Nigeria, under the aegis of the Abeokuta Women's Union led by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, protested against the political and economic programme of the colonial authorities.

Interestingly, a major feature in the political development of women during the colonial era was the formation of a Women's Party in 1944. The party was not organised along the lines of an active political party as 'it did not have a political program as such, but its leaders shared certain definite political views' that led them at a later stage 'to support another political party, the Action Group' (Mba 1982, p 68). Thus, even given the constraints of a colonially imposed political order, the political arrangement during this period allowed for women's participation, albeit in a limited way – women's access to political power was removed and they were deprived of opportunities to exercise power.

As Okome (2001) observes, the emerging political organisations of the colonial era were led by men, who 'welcomed and encouraged the involvement of women only to the extent that they would be foot-soldiers in the struggle to de-racialize power'. To the extent that women's organisations were willing to join nationalist organisations as members of their women's wings, 'there were grounds for the cooperative struggle against colonialism and for nation building'. When women refused to be subsumed under male-controlled party rule they were marginalised in a manner similar to that of the colonial state.

In Nigeria's political history, including the earlier efforts at democratic

rule, women were severely sidelined in terms of representation in government. Independence from colonial rule did not necessarily lead to the reorganisation of political power and the political systems were remarkably similar to those of the colonial era.

The nature of women's involvement in the political process has remained constant over time. For instance, a cursory look at clauses in party constitutions relating to boards of trustees, party caucuses and congresses, which are powerful organs in the party, show that few women are represented and quotas apportioned to women amount to mere tokenism.

Article 12.76(1) of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) constitution, relating to the composition of the board of trustees, states that:

There shall be a Board of Trustees of the party which shall consist of: ... (d) All founding fathers and founding mothers of the party; (e) Two women selected from each of the six geo-political zones; (f) Three members at least one of whom shall be a woman from each of the six geo-political zones; ... Former Deputy Presidents of the Senate and Deputy Speakers of the House of Representative, who are still members of the Party.

These sections highlight some of the areas where the PDP has deliberately affirmed quotas for women and, while the sections are commendable, they are still not adequate to support gender parity in the party system. A closer review of some of the provisions will show that some of the major positions cited in reality go to men, not to women. For example, the composition of the Board of Trustees puts women at a disadvantage. How many women have been past presidents, past governors or senators, as stipulated?

The Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) constitution provides for woman leaders in all party organs as well as state congresses. For instance, in the case of state congresses the constitution spells out in Article 7.12 that there should be: '(xiii) 5 delegates from each Ward of the State elected for that purpose at least one of who must be a woman; (xiv) The local government Youth Leader and Woman Leader if [she is] from the local government.'¹

Article 4.12 states that: '(ii) The Board of Trustees shall consist of 3 members from each State of the federation at least one who shall be a woman and one

1 Most political parties in Nigeria have a position of 'woman leader', who leads the women's wing of the party at local government, state and national levels. Men understand that by creating a women's wing, they effectively define what women can aspire to. It is a way of saying politics is a man's game, but women may be adjunct or auxiliary, members of the party. Naturally this move excludes women from decision-making processes.

member from the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. A chairman shall be appointed by them from their number.'

It could be reasoned from the above that the provisions for women are indirect and not specific. Consequently, the position of women members is uncertain.

In general, women have never held positions in the parties beyond those of one of many vice-chairpersons. The negligible presence of women in institutionalised politics is equally apparent in their low participation as party executives, elected officers and political appointees. Under the superimposed attempts at postcolonial democracy women were granted a token presence in systems that remained largely patriarchal. Their political presence in decision-making remained highly circumscribed. The marginalisation of women continued into the Fourth Republic.

LEGAL / CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES AND WOMEN'S PRESENCE IN GOVERNMENT

Nigerian women, like their counterparts around the world, face discrimination that limits their opportunities to develop their full potential on a basis of equality with men. According to the Declaration of the Summit of All Women Politicians in Nigeria held in Abuja on 28 June 2002 and organised by Global Rights in collaboration with the Centre for Population and Development Activities and Gender and Development Action, the 'women of Nigeria have noticed with utter dismay the almost complete deterioration of our political and social values, born out of more than three decades of continued male-dominated and -oriented misrule'.

Societal obstacles like religion, tradition and other beliefs must not be allowed to stand in the way of women's progress, women should not be domesticated, they should enjoy the same rights to work and the same associated benefits as men. They, along with men, must have access to free and functional education and health care and the electoral process must not be a preserve of the rich.

Certainly, 'if the definition of democracy allows for diversity of opinion and the participation of different groups, then it cannot thrive by excluding women, which effectively constitute half of the world's population and half of each and every single national population' (Akiyode-Afolabi & Arogundade 2003). The fact that the Constitution is supposed to promote the evolution of the democratic process is not in doubt. Indeed, the right to democratic governance is an entitlement conferred upon all Nigerian citizens by law.

Section 40 of the 1999 Constitution states that:

Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate

with other persons, and in particular he may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his interests: Provided that the provisions of this section shall not derogate from the powers conferred by this Constitution on the Independent National Electoral Commission with respect to political parties to which that Commission does not accord recognition.

Section 42 states further that:

1) A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination.

These sections of the Constitution confirm that any Nigerian, irrespective of gender, may go to court to seek redress if his or her franchise is violated. The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex and there is nothing in it that excludes women from participating in politics. What seems to be debatable is whether the democratic process can flourish in the current dispensation where constitutional guarantees for women's participation in politics are limited.

Another point of interest is the Electoral Reform Committee (ERC), inaugurated by the late president, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. The ERC, which was mandated to review and ensure the quality and standard of general elections, addressed some of the pertinent issues of the country's electoral democracy. The committee, headed by a retired chief justice, Justice Muhammed Uwais, acknowledged the voices of women and their proposals for gender democracy and made some gender-sensitive recommendations worthy of note (Akiyode-Afolabi 2010).

For example, the ERC recommended that the chair and deputy chair of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should not both be of the same gender and that of six geographical representatives two must be women. In addition, there should be a representative from the women's organisation. The ERC also recommended that two of six geopolitical zonal representatives on the parties' registration and regulatory commissions must be women and that 20% of the members of the governing bodies of political associations should be women, while political parties should nominate more women and youths as candidates and ensure that women have equal access to leadership opportunities within party organisations.

The committee recommended that for the purposes of proportional representation political parties nominate at least 30% female candidates and 2% physically challenged candidates for legislative elections.

The only possibly gender friendly proposal by the National Assembly for the 2010 Electoral Act was a new clause allowing candidates to stand as independents and this was later thrown out by the state houses of assembly. As Akiyode-Afolabi (2010) notes, this development is an illustration of 'the failure of the Nigerian state ... to put a legal framework in place to support a gender friendly electoral system'. The experiences of women during the last four general elections, particularly that in 2011, are a manifestation of the fact that political parties have refused to integrate women's needs and concerns into the business of democracy.

Attempts by political parties to present a gender agenda through public pronouncements at campaign rallies and references in their manifestoes to women's political development are just gimmicks to woo women voters. In fact, there is a disregard for women's political contributions and their gender concerns. There are only a few women on the national executives of political parties in Nigeria and where women do manage to get to this level they occupy mediocre positions like welfare and the organisation of social events or they are ex-officio, which, more often than not, means politically redundant. As is evident from the manifestoes and constitutions of a number of parties, almost all the political parties in Nigeria at best pay lip service to women's political development since they are still considered 'outsiders' in the game of politics.²

While democratic transition in Nigeria in 1999 created openings that politicise gender identity and women's representation in public office received a boost between 2003 and 2007 there remains both a dearth of political opportunities for women and severe self-reinforcing constraints on gender participation. Although the numbers of women in politics are increasing, they remain grossly under-represented. An analysis of Nigeria's electoral system shows that there was an unprecedented increase in the number of female candidates in the 2003 and 2007 elections and women generally were encouraged to participate and to stand for political office, yet only a handful of women made it to the end.

There was a marginal increase in the numbers of women in governance after the general elections of 1999, 2003 and 2007 but fewer women were successful in the polls in 2011 than in 2007. As at 2011 only about 8% of those in political office were women.

An overview of the four elections shows that 2.8% of representatives in the Senate in 1999 were women, 3.7% in 2003, 8.3% in 2007 and 6.4% in 2011. In the House of Representatives the percentages were 3.3%, 6.1%, 7.2% and 6.7%. The percentage of women elected as deputy governors was 2.8% in 1999, 5.6% in 2003

2 For reported cases of women politicians being cheated out of nomination as party candidates see Mangywat, Okechukwu & Mahdi 2009; Ibrahim, Jibrin & Salihu 2004; Akiyode-Afolabi & Arogundade 2003; Akiyode-Afolabi & Odemwingie 2008.

Table 1
Number and Percentage of Women Elected in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011

Position	Number of seats available	1999		2003		2007		2011	
		Number of women	% of total	Number of women	% of total	Number of women	% of total	Number of women	% of total
Presidency	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Senate	109	3	2.75	4	3.7	9	8.3	7	6.4
House of Reps	360	12	3.3	21	6.1	26	7.2	24	6.7
Governors	36	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Deputy governors	36	1	2.8	2	5.6	6	16.7	2	5.6
State houses of assembly	990	12	1.21	38	3.48	52	5.25	69	7.0
Total	1 531	27		67		94		102	

Source: Adapted from INEC 1999, 2003, 2007 & 2011 results

and 16.7% in 2007. The percentage dropped to 5.6% in 2011. In the state houses of assembly the percentages were 1.2%, 3.5%, 5.25% and, significantly, 7.0%.

These results fall below the mandate of the United Nations and of civil society groups, which advocate 30% representation (Pogoson 2005). Moreover, the marginal increase was due to the growing political consciousness of women and the activities of women's and civil society organisations. It was not in any way the result of any deliberate government policy geared to enhancing women's participation in electoral politics (Iloh & Ikenna 2009).

Nigerian women have not progressed beyond the level they occupied under the military, remaining underrepresented in the current democratic governance and holding less than 8% of elected positions at all levels of governance. This is the case despite the government's commitments at international, regional and national levels. For instance, Nigeria endorsed both the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA), which provides for an affirmative action policy, and Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals on gender equality and women's empowerment. It also instituted a National Gender Policy.

The BPFA specifically enjoined political parties to:

- (a) Consider examining party structures and procedures to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women;
- (b) Consider developing initiatives that allow women to participate fully in all internal policy-making structures and appointive and electoral processes;
- (c) Consider incorporating gender issues in their political agenda, taking measures to ensure that women can participate in the leadership of political parties on an equal basis with men.

www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/declar.htm

Conscious of the need for change, many gender activists and civil society organisations in Nigeria have organised advocacy, training and research programmes on affirmative action for women leaders in political parties. They have succeeded in encouraging a significant number of women to compete for political office in an effort to ensure that women, in line with Nigeria's National Policy on Women, occupy at least 35% of all appointed and elected posts.

These efforts at sensitisation and advocacy notwithstanding, the targets of women's representation continue to elude the country. Statistics provided by UN Women (2011) on the current number of women holding political office in the country show that to achieve the 35% outlined in the National Gender Policy and the international target of 30%, 536 and 460 positions respectively of 1 533

(excluding the posts of president and vice-president) would have to be occupied by women. Political parties must provide an enabling environment if these targets are to be attained.

POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE REPRODUCTION OF PATRIARCHY

Political parties are an essential component of democracy and are central to our understanding of how politics works. In a democracy they are the crucial link between the citizens and the government. They are specifically designed to allow groups to be heard that might otherwise be left out of the system. By competing in elections and mobilising citizens behind particular visions of society, as well as through their performance in the legislature, parties offer citizens important choices in governance, avenues for political participation and opportunities to shape their country's future. They provide a way for citizens to hold elected party officials accountable for their actions in government.

Members of various political parties reflect the diversity of the cultures from which the parties emerge. Some are small and built around a set of political beliefs. Others are organised around economic interests or shared history. Still others are loose alliances of different citizens who may only come together at election time. When public confidence in political parties is compromised the entire democratic process suffers. In all sustainable democracies the party system must be deeply and durably entrenched in the fabric of society.

Political parties are, therefore, central to the advancement of women's participation in politics. They play a central role in recruiting and endorsing candidates for election and in supporting specific items on parliamentary agendas. That is to say, they are the pathway for women's entry into the political arena. Sections 221-229 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution make detailed provision for the registration, functioning, conduct and finances of political parties, setting out the conditions for their registration.

Only three parties were registered to contest the 1999 elections but the Electoral Act was later amended and the procedure for registering parties was liberalised and 63 parties registered for the 2011 elections. Of these, the United National Party for Development (UNPD) was the only female-led party in the country. Its national chairperson, Chief Ebiti Ndok, was the party's presidential candidate.

Nonetheless, Nigeria retains a very illiberal regulatory regime for the registration and functioning of political parties. Consequently, women are left out, not only as contenders but also as card-carrying members of existing political parties (Ibrahim, Okoye & Adambara 2006). The question then is: 'why have Nigerian women not been able to break through and into the political party

machinery?'. One of the reasons is possibly the fact that the parties are 'consciously male-biased, formed and run/operated based on male fraternal connections and relationships ... run as "old boy" networks, which leave little room for women to come in'. That is to say, '[t]he agenda setting (in all political parties) is male even the meeting hours reflect men's timetable rather than women's' (Mangvwat, Okechukwu & Mahdi 2009, p 86). This pattern of gender insensitivity cuts across party lines. Other barriers that have directly or indirectly militated against women's participation in politics include a lack of internal democracy, the monetisation of politics, godfatherism and an unfavourable terrain characterised by thuggery.

More often than not, party membership is largely dominated by men and this tends to affect women when it comes to selecting or electing candidates for elections. 'The effect of these conditions is that parties that emerge must be very big, very rich and have the capacity to bring together money-wielding forces from different parts of the country' (see Mangvwat, Okechukwu & Mahdi 2009; Ibrahim & Salihu 2004; Akiyode-Afolabi & Arogundade 2003; Akiyode-Afolabi & Odemwingie 2008).

Consequently, the major factor in the establishment of political parties is not the aggregation of people with similar ideologies or interests but the establishment of ethnic coalitions led by regional barons with strong financial backing.

Increasingly, women are incorporated into the political system as subordinate, ineffectual adjuncts to men and the nature of their incorporation reveals the persistence of male dominance and gender bias over time (Okome 2001). More often than not men constitute a larger percentage of the party membership and this tends to affect women when it comes to selecting or electing candidates for public office.

One of the reasons why women have not been able to break into the political party machinery is the fact that the parties and their constitutions and manifestoes are consciously male-biased, formed and operated and based on fraternal connections and relationships. That is to say, men dominate the setting of agendas in all political parties; even the meeting hours reflect men's timetables rather than women's. Since men usually form the majority in a party's structures they tend to dominate the party hierarchy and are therefore in a position to influence the party's internal politics.

As Okoosi-Simbine (2003) observes, the marginalisation of women within parties is a major hurdle for women to contend with. 'The structures and caucuses of the political parties are mostly male dominated. They are therefore inevitably tilted to the promotion of the interest of men.' Women usually constitute a smaller percentage of political party membership because of the social, cultural and religious attitudes of different sections of Nigerian society, which often relegate women to the background.

Parties have formal procedures for the election of their leaders but these procedures are often disregarded. An important aspect of the parties' internal functioning is that the regulatory framework outlined above tends to give rise to a situation in which political 'godfathers' play a major role in internal party politics, so, where parties do adhere to the formal procedures the godfathers have ways of determining the outcome.

At party congresses leaders are elected and candidates are nominated for elective positions. The elections, however, are usually pre-determined and party bosses or godfathers tend to have the final say in the selection of leaders. The fact that they are unwilling to allow internal party democracy frequently leads to conflict and constrains the development of parties as popular organisations. Indeed, over the years these party chiefs have developed comprehensive techniques for eliminating popular aspirants from party posts and for preventing them from being nominated for elective positions (Ibrahim, Okoye & Adambara 2006).

In studies conducted by Ako-Nai (2005), Bruce (2005) and Mohammed & Okoosi-Simbine (2006), the inability of women to attain party executive positions was identified as a major cause of their marginalisation, especially with regard to gaining their party's nomination. Women's experiences during party primaries have not improved at all in successive elections. Evidence abounds of deliberate manoeuvring by party loyalists and inclinations of preferences for male aspirants over their female counterparts (Mangvwat, Okechukwu & Mahdi 2009; Ibrahim & Salihu 2004; Akiyode-Afolabi & Arogundade 2003).

Scholars and activists believe that alongside these undemocratic procedures parties have also instituted techniques for the elimination of popular and female aspirants from party primaries. These techniques include the misuse of power by powerful 'party owners', party barons, state governors, godfathers and so on; zoning and other forms of administrative fiat; violence by thugs or security personnel; bribing officials and voters to support particular candidates and disregard for the results for the vote, declaring the loser to be the winner (Akiyode-Afolabi & Odemwingie 2008; Ibrahim, Okoye & Adambara 2006). All these ploys discourage women from standing.

Party funding is another avenue for the marginalisation of women, youths and other vulnerable groups and individuals. Parties need funding in order to survive, compete and perform their democratic functions, both during election campaigns and in the intervals between elections. Yet political money and those who donate it are widely seen as problematic – at times even as threats to democracy. In a country where there is still extreme poverty politics is tied to cash and elections go to the highest bidder.

Lack of adequate finance is a crucial hindrance to effective female participation

in politics in Nigeria. Most women do not have the financial resources of their male counterparts. Although political parties are partly funded by the state, most of their funds come through party financiers and the details of these sums are rarely recorded (Ibrahim, Okoye & Adambara 2006). Indeed, the role of money in contemporary Nigerian politics is so overwhelming that it tends to supersede other considerations. This has implications for the representation of women, both formal and informal, and for their voice in the formulation of policies affecting their society.

While women are poorly represented in the lower levels of government they are rarer still in the upper echelons of decision-makers. The absence of women from structures of governance inevitably means that national, regional and local priorities – that is, the way resources are allocated – are typically defined without meaningful input from women, whose life experience gives them a different awareness of the community's needs, concerns and interests from that of men.

Though women participate in campaign rallies and voter registration exercises they seem to be left out when it is time for elections or appointments. Following the political party primaries in the 2011 elections it became evident that the elimination of women through a well-orchestrated process of manipulating the outcome of most primaries was virtually party policy across the board. Most of the women who sought to compete in the primaries were eliminated, although the parties had promised that many female aspirants would be encouraged and supported in their search for nomination.

In general, party officials refused to take the candidacies of female aspirants seriously. Ironically, one of their main reasons was the affirmative action policy adopted by some parties, which waived nomination fees for female aspirants. In most constituencies party executives set out to portray women as having insufficient commitment to the party. Local party barons argued repeatedly that by convincing the national executives to waive nomination fees women had demonstrated a lack of commitment to party development. It was said that male candidates were more committed because they made their financial contributions willingly.

According to Hon Habiba Sabo Gabarin (2004), the PDP's policy of waiving fees for women was being thwarted by power-brokers within the party who 'hid nominations forms from women and so eventually women aspirants had to pay the full cost to get the forms, or at least paid by way of "donations" to the party'.

Another strategy used to exclude women is 'cultural deviancy'. The argument is that Nigerian culture does not accept assertive, or public, or leadership roles for women. Concerted campaigns portraying female aspirants as acting in contravention of their culture are designed to marginalise them. Closely associated with negative labelling is the use of abusive language to demoralise and

delegitimise female aspirants. Many of them were subjected to smear campaigns centred on their alleged loose moral standing and some were insulted directly. In a newspaper interview Senator Grace Bent, a member of the Senate from 2007 to 2011, cited blackmail, mudslinging, maligning and character assassination as vices that go with politics in Nigeria (*Saturday Vanguard* 2008, p 16; Ibrahim, Okoye & Adambara 2006).

The provisions of a number of the parties' manifestoes acknowledge the importance of women in society and the need to support their participation in politics. A close analysis of the constitutions and manifestoes indicates that there is insufficient provision for women. A review by the author prior to the 2011 general elections shows that the mission statements, goals, mottos and objectives of most political party constitutions and manifestoes are gender neutral. While they speak of gender equality in theory, for example, the motto of the ACN shows a commitment to justice and peace; without gender equality there cannot be justice.

Another example is the motto of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), which emphasises equal opportunity. The same applies to the Movement for the Restoration and Defence of Democracy (MRDD), the PDP and the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), to mention a few. A detailed analysis of subsequent provisions, particularly relating to internal structure, however, belies these aspirations. Another issue of interest is the laudable membership clauses in party constitutions. All the constitutions reviewed open their membership to all without discrimination; however there is a need to make the membership of equal benefit to all in reality. It is doubtful whether there is a clear understanding of the implications of gender as a category.

While political parties have embraced the principle of a quota system, the review revealed that there appears to be no uniform quota. For example, the Change Advocacy Party (CAP) advocates 50% representation but the Labour Party aims only for 30%. Moreover, only a few women were elected as chairpersons and councillors. Indeed, no woman holds a substantive position except in the relatively new parties, where a few are to be found in the national executive council. A look at clauses relating to boards of trustees, party caucuses and congresses, which are powerful organs in the party, shows that there are no significant numbers of women members and the quotas apportioned to women amount to mere tokenism.

THE 2011 ELECTION SITUATION

Before the 2011 political party primaries the president's wife, Dame Patience Jonathan, initiated the Women for Change Initiative (WCI) as her pet project. The

first lady called on Nigerian women to stand for election in 2011 and urged men to support those who had already made their intentions known. Interestingly, she assured the men that the women would remain loyal and committed and would continue to take care of their homes. She also advised women to shun discriminatory practices against their fellows and to unite in their quest for equitable political representation (Taiwo 2011).

In a bid to help women achieve their dreams in politics, prior to the 2011 elections the Ministry of Women Affairs assured all successful female political candidates of financial support. This would come through a women's political trust fund designed to increase the number of women elected and appointed to political positions at all levels of governance. The fund aims to provide aspiring women politicians with some financial support for their campaigns, irrespective of the party to which they belong.

The fund, which was also intended to provide logistical support for female candidates in the 2011 elections and beyond, was supported by the United Nations. According to the Minister of Women Affairs, the federal government would make available N100-million of seed money and this, together with expected funds from UN Women and other development partners, was to be disbursed by the Women's Political Trust Fund under its donor-basket support programme (Ashefon 2011; Taiwo 2011).

The dismal showing of women politicians in the 2011 party primaries indicates that, such initiatives notwithstanding, women still have a long way to go to be accepted and voted into office. This was particularly evident in the PDP's presidential primary election, held on 13 January 2011. The only female candidate, Sarah Jibril, who stood against President Goodluck Jonathan and the former vice-president, Atiku Abubakar, received only one vote to Jonathan's 2 736 and Abubakar's 805. It appears that Sarah Jibril voted for herself.³

Evidently, primaries remain largely a charade. The governorship primaries were no better, with women either losing or being advised to step down. Many sitting female legislators lost the primaries. An assessment of the performances of women during the party primaries reveals that the number nominated as candidates across the board fell 'below the expectation of the Ministry [Women Affairs] and other concerned stakeholders like the United Nations ...' (United Nations 2011).

Although the largest number of women ever stood in the 2011 primary elections the number of female candidates who won their state's primary elections was disappointing. As indicated in the UN Women's preliminary report (UN 2011),

3 Sarah Jubril's presidential ambitions emerged in 1992 when she was an aspirant in the defunct Social Democratic Party. Six years later she contested on the platform of the PDP but lost to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo.

the 'party primaries indicate that neither the national 35% nor the international 30% targets would be met after the 2011 general elections'. As a former senatorial aspirant in Lagos State, Chief Onikepo Oshodi, observed, female participation is commendable, 'but it is more of men's affair'.

'Women came out in large numbers for the primaries [more than 10 000 stood] but they were badly treated by the party machinery,' she said. She noted that 'women face hostilities from political bigwigs, pressures on them to step down despite their popularity in their various constituencies and those delegates were wooed with cash which these women could not afford' (Ashefon 2011).

Although there were more female candidates for most of the elected positions than there had been in the three previous elections, Ebiti Ndok was the only female presidential candidate. There were four female vice-presidential candidates, namely, Rose Yakubu of the African Renaissance Party (ARP), Kadijat B Abubakar of the Better Nigeria Progressive Party (BNPP), Binutu Fela Akinola of the Fresh Democratic Party (FRESH) and Bilikisu Ismo Magogo of the National Transformation Party (NTP).

As Table 2 shows, 10 037 people stood for the seven levels of executive office. Of these only 909 (9.1%) were female. The table also shows that the position of deputy governor attracted more female candidates (16.7%) than any other executive office. This was closely followed by the percentage of contestants for the office of vice-president (15%). The lowest percentages were in the gubernatorial (3.7%) and presidential (5%) contests. The implication of this is that very few women made it onto the parties' candidates' lists.

Table 2
Gender Distribution of Candidates by Office

Office	GENDER		Total
	Female number [%]	Male number [%]	
Deputy governor	58 [16.7]	289[83.3]	347[100]
Governor	13 [3.7]	340[96.3]	353[100]
House-of-Representatives	220 [9.1]	2 188[90.9]	2408[100]
President	1 [5.0]	19[95.0]	20[100]
Senate	90 [10.1]	800[89.9]	890[100]
State assemblies	524[8.7]	5 475[91.3]	5 999[100]
Vice president	3 [15.0]	17[85.0]	20[100]
Total	909[9.1]	9128[90.9]	10 037[100]

Source: Author's computations based on data from the INEC database

It is instructive to note that not all states held gubernatorial elections because some governors began their terms later than others because the 2007 election results in their states had been contested.⁴ Among these were the governors of Edo, Ekiti, Osun and Anambra states (www.inecnigeria.org/about/).

A total of 353 candidates contested gubernatorial seats. Thirteen (3.7%) were women, who stood in ten states, namely, Benue, Delta, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Kano, Kebbi, Kwara, Oyo and Plateau. None was successful, which means that to date the closest women have come to playing a role at the most crucial level of governance in the states has been election as deputy governor. Nigeria is yet to produce a female executive governor of a state apart from the brief period that Dame Virginia Etiaba, deputy to Governor Peter Obi, acted as governor of Anambra State when he was 'illegally' impeached by the state house of assembly (Irabor 2011).

Virginia Etiaba governed from November 2006 to February 2007, when an appeal court nullified the impeachment. In 2010, following a court of appeal judgement declaring Dr Kayode Fayemi the lawful winner of the gubernatorial election in Ekiti, the seventh female deputy governor, Olufunmilayo Olayinka, assumed office.

The 2011 general elections produced only one female deputy governor – the ACN's Adejoke Orelope Adefulire of Lagos State. Adefulire had served as the Lagos State Commissioner for Women Affairs before the party adopted her as its candidate for deputy governor. She replaced Adebisi Sarah Sosan, the outgoing deputy governor to incumbent governor Babtunde Fashola, who was re-elected.

There was a general increase in the number of male gubernatorial candidates with women as their deputies. At least four parties in Lagos State selected women to stand for this position.

Female candidates constituted 9.1% of the 3 306 candidates from all parties who stood for the National Assembly elections. Despite the number of female aspirants only a few emerged as candidates and fewer of these won – fewer than had done so in 2007. Of the 109 victorious senators in 2011 only 7 (6.4%) were women. The successful candidates were Nkechi J Nwaogu, Helen U Esuene, Nenadi Usman and Aisha Jummai of the PDP, Christiana N O Anyanwu and Joy Emordi both of the APGA and Chief Oluremi Tinubu of the ACN.

There was also a significant drop in the number of successful female candidates for the House of Representatives, with women winning only 19 of the 360 available seats (5.27%). This is an abysmal figure in the light of the successes

4 The Electoral Act provides for contestants to challenge the outcome of elections before election tribunals and the Court of Appeal is the apex court in respect of election matters.

recorded in 2007, 2003 and 1999, when the figures were respectively 27(7.5%), 21(5.8%) and 12(3.3%) (Irabor 2011). The decrease in the percentage of female candidates who won is particularly disturbing in the light of the increase in the number of women who contested the 2011 elections.

CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD

It is evident from the above that very few Nigerian women have successfully contested political positions in spite of the pioneering efforts of women like Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Margaret Ekpo in the 1950s. This is largely due to their limited presence in the political parties that are the gatekeepers.

Within the parties, tokenism in appointments as well as blocked channels of access to circles of leadership have been a major element in gender relations (Mba 1982; Okome 2001; Mama 1997). 'Men are the major determinants of political actions and inactions generally concerned with the perpetuation of power of the state ... when women compete with men for access to political power, they do so on the terms already established by men for competition among themselves' (Chapman 1993, p 11, cited by Agablaobi 2010).

Women are further challenged by family and religious values and educational and economic disadvantages that perpetuate their subjugation and disempowerment. Thus, an examination of the status of Nigerian women in political parties cannot be divorced from the consideration of the entire political situation in the country. The lower status of women, due to gender imbalances that arise out of unequal opportunities and access to control over productive resources and benefits, greatly impaired their chances in the 2011 elections.

As indicated above, the internal selection processes of political parties are fundamental in the determination of the gender situation within them. Most parties proclaim gender equality in their constitutions and manifestoes but the reality is that the internal party leadership still favours men. There is, therefore, a need to continue to press for the appointment of more women to internal party structures and for the system to be amended to include more women through affirmative action, quotas and other measures, so that women who seek office survive the selection process at party level. It is also important for selection procedures within parties to be inclusive, transparent and democratic.

Women need to join political parties in large numbers and to be key decision-makers within them in order to change the existing institutional and structural discriminatory practices (Van Allen 2001).

Despite the existence of constitutional provisions and progressive laws, policy frameworks, conventions and protocols to protect or promote gender equality, religious and cultural practices and customary law or administrative

practices that lack a gender perspective marginalise women. Patriarchy must be addressed in the following ways: establishing continuous dialogue between female and male leaders, increasing women's participation in local elections, endorsing and entrenching a quota system/mechanism in national and political party constitutions, reviewing electoral systems and adopting those most conducive to women's participation (for example, proportional representation). Political parties should establish legal funds to enable women politicians to challenge electoral malpractices in court.

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