

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN NIGERIA'S 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Evidence and Perspectives from Kano and Oyo states

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's politics have been accused of gender imbalance since independence, and scholarship is replete with discussions of factors responsible for the low level of women's participation and representation in politics, and women's poor showing in electoral contests. Most studies of women's political participation in Nigeria have taken a unidirectional approach of analysing or discussing women's marginalisation in both appointive and elective offices. This study replaces the unidirectional approach with a multidirectional and multistakeholder analysis of the gender mainstreaming effort in Nigeria's 2019 general election. With a focus on Kano and Oyo states, we argue that increased gender consciousness has not translated to any significant improvement in women's representation in politics, thus implying that mainstreaming gender is of no effect if women's participation in politics does not translate to a substantial representation of women in both number and influence.

Keywords: gender mainstreaming, women in politics, Nigeria's 2019 elections

INTRODUCTION

Significant studies of women's political participation in Nigeria have taken a unidirectional approach of analysing or discussing women's marginalisation in both appointive and elective offices. Such widespread approaches among political scientists, political historians and political philosophers have left a gap

in the literature that requires urgent attention. The gap in question is the under-researched underrepresentation of women within the entire electoral process, other than women as elective or appointive office holders.

Studies in Nigerian politics have documented women's participation since pre-colonial times (Denzer 1994). From the colonial era to post-independence, Mba (1982) establishes how women mobilised and challenged all forms of the oppression and suppression which permeated their economic, socio-cultural and political spaces. During the years of military rule a significant number of Nigerian women stood their ground across governance strata in what Mba (1989) described as altercations between 'Kaba and Khaki' (kaba is a Yoruba word for a woman's dress and is used in this context to denote women, while khaki signifies men in the military government). This continued until the commencement of the fourth democratic republic in 1999.

The transition to democratic governance in Nigeria marked unprecedented success in the following areas:

- i) national identity, as the world began to confer the respect of a democratic state on Nigeria and relate to her accordingly;
- ii) a smooth transition to civilian rule which has since been sustained; and
- iii) an opening of governance circles to the hitherto deprived citizens from minority communities, and the potential for the expansion of this space to include women.

Although universal adult suffrage had been in practice since the pre-colonial times in southern Nigeria, exclusively male suffrage in the northern parts prevailed until 1979, and hampered women's access to public spheres. The attainment of national universal suffrage did not translate to an increased representation of women in government, and the prolonged military interregnum made it almost impossible to test the viability of an inclusive political system.

However, the transition to civilian government at the start of the Fourth Republic provided an opportunity for women's political participation and representation. The Fourth Republic has witnessed significant political awareness and an improvement in both the southern and northern regions, resulting in increased participation by women. Yet despite these achievements, much remains unaddressed. Parity in politics is still a far cry, such that since 1999, the number of women in elective and appointive offices continues to dwindle. This unstable graph of women's representation in Nigeria's politics has been variously described as marginalisation, stigmatisation, low visibility (Okome & Zakiya 2013), and broken marginality (Oluwaniyi 2016).

Global advances of sustainable development goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 5 which seeks equality of the genders across spaces, is an ideal towards which nations of the world will strive until 2030. Women's participation in politics speaks to this goal, especially within African states where democracy is starting to take root. On this note, recent domestic and international pressures have influenced policy makers in Nigeria to adopt policies and programmes that will encourage gender diversity and inclusion. These include measures that deliberately sought to increase women's presence in the political parties, electoral management bodies, election observer missions and election security.

One of the earliest major sources of international pressure dates back to the Women's Decade (1975-1985) to form the focus of the Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC) established in 1987 at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. In pursuance of Nairobi Conference decisions, WORDOC was at the forefront of the demand for an 'independent National Commission on Women that would be responsible to the president to promote women's studies and to initiate reforms in the social, economic, legal and political structures so as to improve the general welfare of women' (WORDOC Newsletter, 1987). This resulted in the establishment of the National Commission for Women by the Federal Government in 1988; and currently (2022) there is a Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, which is replicated in similar commissions at the state level (Oyelude & Omotoso 2019). These are a response to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, which provides for establishing legal frameworks and public institutions to protect women against discrimination. Also emanating from the debates and resolutions reached at the famous 1995 Beijing Conference was the adoption of a declaration aiming at 35% of women participation in politics.

By 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (Article 1) which urges states to ensure increased representation of women in all decision-making levels in national, regional, and international institutions. With this, mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict were introduced. Furthermore, Article 8 calls on all actors to adopt a gender perspective when negotiating and implementing peace agreements (UNSCR 2000). These international initiatives were subsequently complemented by domestic pressures which paid off with the institution of several policy measures, such as the adoption of the *National Gender Policy* of 2006 (revised in 2021). Also relevant here is the inauguration on 24 March 2011, of the *Nigerian Women Trust Fund* (NWTF) with an initial sum of NGN100 million (or USD645 161) by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development. This was to help offset the campaign costs of 230 female aspirants, regardless of their political party

affiliations (Gberevbie & Oviasogie 2013, p. 98), and ultimately guide future actions destined to promote greater participation by women in Nigeria's electoral politics. By 2014, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) produced its Gender Policy.

Prior to the 2019 elections, a few other legislative, policy and administrative measures were conceived and implemented, with a view to encouraging more women to participate in the elections. Such efforts at mainstreaming gender across electoral processes align with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); International Covenant on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ICRPWD); African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR); Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa; African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa; the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015 (PoA); and the currently pursued Sustainable Development Goals.

The INEC Gender Policy is designed

... [to] contribute to strengthening gender equality in the Commission and its relationship with other stakeholders by giving due attention to gender considerations and promoting equity and equality between women and men in the electoral process. This is in consonance with the Commission's core values and guiding principles.

(INECGP 2014, p.7)

The political parties themselves (especially the two leading parties, the People's Democratic Party-PDP and All Progressive Congress-APC) have mirrored these changes as their constitutions also contained clauses promoting gender inclusivity. For instance, Chapter 1(6.5) of the PDP constitution states that: 'The party shall support the emancipation and participation of women by encouraging their representation at all levels (Constitution of The People's Democratic Party (2012 As Amended)'.

Similarly, before its revision the APC constitution in Article 7(vii) states that as part of its objectives the party shall 'protect the interests ... of women in Nigeria ... and faithfully strive to obtain for them the greatest possible return for their labour and full participation in the Nigerian enterprise'. The revised constitution, in both Articles 7(vii) and (viii), provides for 'affirmative action in appointive and elective offices for women in the party organs and in government

... and a following commitment to promote and protect the interest of women ... respectively'. These will be further interrogated in later parts of this study.

With these arrangements, the 2019 general elections were held in the context of heightened awareness about, and commitments to, equal gender participation in elections, raising hopes of a much higher level of participation by women in the elections. Consequently, this study's multi-directional and holistic interrogation of women's participation across political processes in Nigeria is restricted to the 2019 elections. It takes due note of the various efforts of scholars, activists, policymakers, party stalwarts, media and the voting masses, in a continued condemnation of women's marginalisation across significant political activities beyond the legislature and executive offices.

We examine the nature, dimensions, and impact of recent gender-mainstreaming measures (policies and practices) adopted and applied during the 2019 general elections in Kano and Oyo States. As is the case across the country, women's role in elections in the two selected states comprise what Omotoso (2022) describes as tactical and spontaneous public communication drawn from collective strength exemplified through cheerleading at political rallies, grassroots (often door-to-door) campaigns, protests against election misconduct, vying for political offices and serving as political appointees, among others.

The article is organised in five sections. Following the introduction, the second section presents a review of extant literature on women's electoral participation and political representation in Nigeria. The third section offers a theoretical framework for the study, while section four discusses our data on women's participation in the 2019 elections, against the background of recent reforms adopted by stakeholders in Nigeria to assure a more gender inclusive electoral process. The final section concludes the study.

LITERATURE ON WOMEN'S ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN NIGERIA

The role of gender in Nigeria's politics and government has been the subject of considerable intellectual and policy reflections and debates (Ihemeje 2013). Nigerian laws, including sections 40 and 42(1) and section 77(2) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, outlaws every form of gender discrimination; and the Nigerian National Gender Policy of 2006 proposes a 35% affirmative action quota for women (Egwu 2015). Nonetheless, available evidence indicates that women have continued to be marginalised in the political process, including in electoral processes, even during democratic regimes.

Discussing transnational democracy from a feminist perspective, Omotoso (2016, p.145) notes 'numerous scholars' detection of women's marginalisation in

politics and the society at large points to the fact that there remains much to do as regard issues of equity and equality, both at local and transnational levels.'

Three prominent schools of thought which speak to issues of women's political marginalisation are as follows: The first school of thought consists of those such as Ihemeje (2013) and Gberevbie and Oviasogie (2013) who argue that women are invisible in Nigeria's politics. Gberevbie and Oviasogie (2013, p. 89) describe the situation as the 'near-exclusion' of women in favour of their male counterparts.

The second school opines that women in political spheres are seen but not heard. Egwu (2015, p. 399) describes this as a 'silent minority', while Omotoso (2020c, p. 124) illustrates it first as 'visibility without audibility' which connects with 'epistemic invisibility'. Epistemic invisibility extends the concept beyond academia and likens the marginalisation of women to deprivation from substantial and intellectual contribution to national development. Furthermore, Omotoso & Faniyi (2020, p. 2) affirm the spatialisation of politics replete with how discourses on women's political participation and representation 'have taken on the largely androcentric idiosyncrasies which persistently present the male gender as key actors in politics while women are only expected to play supportive roles'.

The third school of thought denies the absence of women in Nigeria's politics but argues that women have not successfully secured their rightful place. This resonates with the idea of sparse substantive representation of women in Nigeria's politics. On this topic, Ipadeola (2017, p. 399), avers that:

Although African women seem very visible in the political sphere because of their level of participation in political activities, their influence in the sphere is largely insignificant.

All three schools recognise gender gaps as key issues in politics (Omotoso 2016; Omotoso 2018a), yet scholars have also gone further to analyse the different factors responsible for the low levels of women's electoral participation and representation in politics. Colonial legacy enforced the dominance of men in politics to the extent that even when new chiefs were to be appointed, colonial agents did not see women as capable of performing the roles of such office (Gberevbie & Oviasogie 2013). For Aboribo & Ogue, (2007, p. 93) 'discrimination against women in politics is rooted in traditional beliefs and practices that regard the man as superior to his female counterpart'. Iloh & Ikenna (2009) stressed how, because of the delayed franchise for women in northern Nigeria, the mostly Muslim women from that area were not even allowed to vote for candidates of their choice, let alone stand for elections.

For Yahaya (2012) the problem is their lack of finance and economic power, including corruption and lack of transparency, coupled with little or no access to education. Other factors include electoral violence characterised by thuggery and intimidation (Eyinade 2010; Gberevbie & Oviasogie 2013). In addition, Egwu (2015) identified gender-blind political structures and institutions as the cause; while women's lack of, or inadequacy in political communication skills and strategies (Omotoso & Faniyi 2020; Omotoso 2018b; 2020a & b) has also contributed to the gender gap in politics. Overall, there is also caution against essentialism since multiple intersections contribute to the identified factors in women's political representation (Afshar, 1996). A common factor in the extant literature used in this study establishes how women remain the marginalised other - the 'subaltern' in the context of political representation (Ipadeola 2017, p. 399).

Without ignoring the views of these three schools of thought and the various explanations offered for the low level of women's electoral participation and representation in politics, this study aligns with the need for substantive representation which transcends the numbers and the elective/appointive office scrutiny in favour of a holistic mainstreaming of gender across all political processes. We contribute to scholarship on the extent to which gender has been mainstreamed in Nigeria's electoral processes beyond contesting for political offices and voting during elections, especially since the beginning of the Fourth Republic.

Despite the significant involvement of women in the 2019 electoral processes, what is worrisome is how few women were elected to office. This observation then raises several questions: exactly what measures have been introduced to promote an all-inclusive electoral process during the 2019 elections? To what extent were they applied? And how effective have they been in influencing a much higher level of women's representation during Nigeria's 2019 general elections?

Table 1 below affirms a similar trend of low representation of women in elective positions since 1999, despite a recurrent report of over 45% registered female voters.

The results of the 2019 elections in Table 2 (below) indicate how few women were elected to political offices at both the state and national levels. Many observers and analysts have accordingly queried the entire process and the deployed gender mainstreaming process. While not dismissive of such worries, it is pertinent to consider additional aspects of the 2019 elections.

Table 1: Level of women's participation and representations in Nigerian elections (1999-2015)

Year	House of Assembly	House of Representative	Senate	Deputy Governor
	Seats available/ No. of women			
1999	978/12	360/13	109/3	36/0
2003	951/39	339/21	109/4	36/2
2007	990/54	358/25	109/9	36/6
2011	990/12	360/19	109/7	36/1
2015	990/60	346/14	109/8	NA

Sources: Nzeshi 2007; Egwu 2015, pp. 395-403

NB: Several women have contested both the gubernatorial and presidential elections, but none has ever won.

Table 2: Level of women's participation and representations in the 2019 elections

Year	House of Assembly	House of Representative	Senate	Deputy Governor
	Seats available/ No. of women			
2019	991/44	360/13	109/8	36/3

Source: International Republican Institute (IRI) 2015 Nigeria Election Observation Report; YIAGA Africa Observatory on Youth Candidacy in the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria, April 2015.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theory of Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming theory is grounded in feminist political frameworks that account for gender consciousness, gender awareness and the deliberate embedding of gender-sensitive procedures within society and organisations. As a concept, 'gender mainstreaming' appeared for the first time in international texts after the United Nations Third World Conference on Women (Nairobi 1985). This was in relation to the debate within the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on the role of women in development. It was seen as a 'means of promoting the role of women in the field of development and of integrating women's values into development work' (EG-S-MS 1998, pp. 11-12). Over time, it

has translated from being a concept and theory to a signifier and/or strategy for underscoring exclusionary tendencies and proposing and promoting inclusivity (Andersson 2018).

Gender mainstreaming became a strategy introduced to address the challenges to women, including recognition of the inequalities within households, unpaid labour, feminisation of poverty, differences in legal status and entitlements, discriminatory practices, gender-based violence and ultimately in political power where decisions are made. Among other things, gender mainstreaming aims at determining 'who will be consulted and how, on matters such as the formulation of the issue, the definition of information needs, and assessment of options' (UN 2002) and how policy choices would be formulated and presented to capture gender equality issues.

Gender mainstreaming includes decentralising to achieve equality, envisioning an equitable future by engaging gender impact assessment methods, gender budgeting, and gender disaggregated statistics. This process is more successful in practice when it factors cultures, norms and state disposition so that it is seen to be operational in words and deeds (Kolawole 1998). In practice, gender mainstreaming spotlights a wide range of activities that institutionalise equality by entrenching gender-sensitive practices and norms in the structures of public policy. For Daly (2005), gender mainstreaming should encapsulate theorising political strategising as well as policy articulation. Pertinently, Daly (2005, p. 434) considers 'it fair to say that gender mainstreaming is better developed as a (policy) approach than concept'.

Consequently, Khoalenyane & Enaifoghe (2018) allude to a three-point approach to any gender mainstreaming process, by:

- i) identifying men's partnership in gender equity drive;
- ii) acknowledging a mind reset for men, particularly with regard to women's rights as human rights; and
- iii) an awareness of the long-term implication of gender frameworks being developed.

Our choice of gender mainstreaming theory for this study rests on the recognition of the problematic nature of the theory in achieving gender equality. This has been widely discussed with examples from various countries (Daly 2005; Prugl 2009; Hankivsky 2013; Andersson 2018), revealing the failure of its translation to the achievement of pre-defined objectives. For instance, Nigeria's two foremost political parties have constitutions which provide for a women's caucus and the office of women leaders at national and state levels. From the APC Constitution, articles 14.20 and 14.21 provide for the offices of national women leader and deputy

national women leader saddled with the responsibilities of mobilising women, initiating and implementing strategic programmes

that will endear the party to Nigerian women in consultation with the Zonal and State Women Leaders as approved by the Party.... the Deputy National Women Leader shall: Assist and deputise for the National Women Leader in her absence'...[and shall]... perform such functions as may be assigned to her from time to time by the National Women Leader and or National Chairman and National Working Committee.

Similarly, for the PDP, Article 43.1 & 2 provide for the offices of national woman leader and deputy national woman leader who:

shall be responsible for- (a) mobilizing and organizing women; (b) initiating and implementing strategic programmes and policies aimed at endearing the Party to Nigerian women; and (c) Coordinating the activities of the Zonal and State Woman Leaders. The Deputy National Woman Leader shall assist the National Woman Leader in the discharge of his or her duties; and shall deputize for her or him in her or his absence.

While APC describes the office as that of 'Women Leader', PDP describes it as that of 'Woman Leader' which could both mean different things depending on the contexts of interpretation. On the one hand, 'Women Leader' could be translated as leader of women and in the case of APC, the office must be occupied by a woman. On the other hand, 'Woman Leader' as presented by PDP could be interpreted to mean a leader who is a woman in the party, although a subsequent section of the constitution contradicted this by opening the office to a 'she' or a 'he'. In both parties, similar duties are apportioned. Furthermore, the constitutions of these two leading parties (APC & PDP) in Nigeria differ in their commitments to mainstreaming gender. While the PDP clearly states, under article 6.7, that 'in nomination for Party offices, not less than 35% shall be reserved for women', the APC did not factor gender mainstreaming in their nomination of party officers. Overall, in praxis, both parties have been found to pay lip-service to mainstreaming gender, feigning inclusiveness, as many women who begin as aspirants are systemically marginalised in their transition to candidacy.

We hereby engage gender mainstreaming theory to reveal its challenges within Nigerian politics as it failed to produce expected outcomes, although its values were introduced into the system during the 2019 election.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE 2019 ELECTIONS

Compared with previous elections, the 2019 general elections spotlighted the need for gender parity across the various electoral processes including election observers, party agents, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials (permanent and ad-hoc), security officials, media personnel, voters, and political aspirants in elections, among others. We therefore adopt a combination of document analysis and participant observation methods, as we have both served as election observers for the *Gender Election Watch Programme*. This programme was sponsored by the Nigerian Women's Trust Fund (NWTF) which focused on tracking women's participation in Nigeria's 2019 general elections.

Both Oyo and Kano states are purposively selected as sample states for this study because of their ranking as battlegrounds for electoral decisions (Nigeria Electoral Trends 2019) and their regional locations. With 5 457 747 registered voters, Kano State in the North West region takes the second position, representing 6.5% of total voters in Nigeria. Oyo State in South West Nigeria ranks sixth with 2 934 107 representing 3.5% of the total registered voters. It is worth noting that our two sample states record varying historical trajectories of political participation by women. While the women of Oyo State have engaged strategically in politics since the earliest years of Nigeria's independence, women from Kano State were, largely speaking, late entrants into political spaces. Mba affirms this by asserting that:

Although one country, Nigeria had two different electoral systems: women in the southern regions have been enfranchised, in stages, from 1950; women in the Northern Region were not. The political party in power in the Northern Region, ... was a cadre party, open only to Northern men, who were predominantly Muslim and believed either in seclusion of their women or in the relegation of women to the domestic sphere.

(Mba 1989, pp.70-71)

Since Nigeria's establishment of the Fourth Republic, concerted efforts have been made to ensure that women from the northern regions overcome electoral setbacks. In pursuance of this goal, the 2019 elections embraced gender-mainstreaming measures drawn from the 2006 National Gender Policy which affirms that 'although women actively participate in the membership of political parties, they only serve at the lower cadres of social welfare and serve as supporters for the male to acquire political positions'. The policy notes that:

interest in the position of women in societies has gone beyond seeing women as 'the problem' of development, and/or as 'subject of analysis',

to a focus on gender role/power relations, thereby focusing on men and women in an interactive way, as they both shape and are re-shaped by development processes and practices.

(National Gender Policy 2006, p. 7)

The Gender and Development (GAD) framework was deployed in the preparation and operations that guided the 2019 election:

GAD recognises the centrality of closing gender gaps as the only way to move development forward in a sustainable way and integration of gender in the mainstream of development thinking as a sine qua non for pre-empting such 'gender-blindness'.

(National Gender Policy 2006, p. 16)

Furthermore, certain electoral guidelines adopted during the 2019 general elections paid specific attention to gender balance by key stakeholders at all stages. For instance, the gender principle adopted in the deployment of polling officials: during polls, female voters had a separate queue from male voters and included priority voting for nursing mothers. The Electoral Commission also made some effort to provide specialised electoral materials and priority voting for persons with disabilities. We proceed to stratify the mainstreaming efforts as follows:

Women as actors in electoral processes

The 2019 elections featured women's representation in all stages and processes of the election. These include security personnel, party agents, media, election observers and voters.

Table 3. Electoral stakeholders in Oyo State

S/N	Designation	% of Females	% of Males
1	Party agents	28.50%	71.4%
2	Electoral officers	44.1%	55.8%
3	Security personnel	35.06%	64.9%
4	Observer (int'l & local)	60.65%	39.34%
5	Electoral monitors	23.68%	76.3%
6	Media	40%	60%
7*	Registered voters	50.4%	49.6%

Source: <https://c0m12.cld.bz/NWTF-2019-General-Election-Women-Participation>

*Source: INEC 2020, p.79

Table 4. Electoral stakeholders in Kano State

S/N	Designation	% of Females	% of Males
1	Party agents	16.2%	83.8%
2	Electoral officials	36.2%	63.8%
3	Security personnel	11.8%	88.2%
4	Observer (int'l & local)	38.9%	64.1%
5	Electoral monitors	19.8%	80.2%
6	Media	17.7%	82.3%
7*	Registered voters	44.4%	55.6%

Source: <https://c0m12.cld.bz/NWTF-2019-General-Election-Women-Participation>

*Source: INEC 2020, p.79

A study of trends in both states reveals that more women participated in the 2019 general elections as electoral officers and electoral observers. Oyo State records that 44.1% of electoral officers and 60.7% electoral observers were women. Likewise, Kano State records that 36.2% electoral officers and 38.9% of electoral observers were women. While this is a remarkable success in women's political participation, it is pertinent to engage with other areas showing low participation.

For instance, with 28.5% and 16.2% female party agents respectively, and with electoral monitors at 23.7% and 19.8% in Oyo and Kano states respectively, issues of trust and competence are evident. It could be that political parties would not entrust their vote monitoring to women; but would that mean that women are not sufficiently competent in this regard or that they lack the strength, commitment and staying power for an electoral monitoring process?

Also, with a record of 35.6% and 11.8% representation of security personnel in Oyo and Kano states respectively, why would fewer women be assigned to secure polling booths and secure lives and properties during elections? Does it also speak to the patriarchal nature, the spatialisation and gender bifurcation of Nigeria's political space? It may also be a reflection of the male-dominated nature of the security sector as exemplified in the Nigeria Police Force, and as noted in the Nigeria Police Force Gender Policy (NPF GP 2021). In addition, a 40% male versus 17.7% female representation in the media speaks to a gendered bifurcation of 'soft beats' and 'hard beats', displaying male-centric media gestures to politics and political processes. Such gender bias highlights media roles in un(shaping) democratic and development agendas (Isike & Omotoso 2017). All the questions listed above are deliberately posed to indicate areas of further multi-directional research on women's political participation and representation in politics.

While the percentage of female electoral stakeholders in Oyo State is larger than that of Kano State, it is significant to note that the participation of women in

Kano is improving, despite the historical disadvantages and conservative nature of the state with reference to women's visibility in public spaces. Furthermore, the study shows an improvement in women's level of political awareness, as well as women's interest in politics.

Women as Political Aspirants

The actual, positive impact of the recent gender-mainstreaming measures (policies and practices) adopted and applied during the recently concluded 2019 general elections revealed an increased presence of women in the list of party aspirants. The mainstreaming effort also affected how women progressed from being aspirants to becoming candidates during the elections. Of the 23 442 candidates who contested in the 2019 elections nationwide, women candidates numbered 3 032, representing 12.9% of the total number of candidates in the general elections (Yiaga 2020). Still, women's representation in elected positions at federal and state levels has not exceeded 6% since 1999 (Womanifesto 2021), as Nigeria still ranks 139th out of 156 countries in the list of countries with the largest gender gap (Kareem 2022), indicating significant regression in Nigeria's recent elections.

In particular, the 2019 elections record only six females of the 55 candidates who vied for governorship in Kano State, with only four deputy governorship candidates (tribuneonlineng.com 2019). Moreover, Kano State's 2019 elections followed past trends with no woman elected into the state House of Assembly or the House of Representatives (INEC 2019). In Oyo State, only 6 of 42 governorship candidates were women, while 17 were deputy governorship candidates (Tribuneonlineng.com 2019) and only one woman from Oyo State was elected to the House of Representatives (Placng.org 2019).

These trends echo past narratives of women's marginalisation in political representation, despite their increased awareness and participation in politics. The situation whereby quotas are apportioned to women at face-value is what Pogson (2012, p. 115) describes as tokenism.

It is subsequently remarkable to briefly assess women as voters in the 2019 election. According to INEC, the total number of voters for the 2019 General Elections was 84 004 084, of whom the 39 598 645 female voters constitute 47.14%, while the 44 405 439 male voters constitute 52.85%. A worrisome aspect of the gender mainstreaming effort of government within electoral processes is that a sizable amount of data on gender during the elections was provided by civil society organisations and non-state actors who observed the elections. That not much attention is paid by INEC to the disaggregation of data by gender, reveals a weak link in their gender mainstreaming effort.

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted a multi-directional and holistic analysis of the gender mainstreaming effort in Nigeria's 2019 elections. The discussions spanned the participation of voters, candidates in elections, election observers, party agents, electoral management body (INEC) officials (permanent and ad-hoc), security officials and media personnel, among others, in the entire election process. With Kano and Oyo states as the case study for women's participation in the 2019 elections, our findings highlight significant improvements in the participation of women in Kano State where the disparity and setback caused by a historical north-south gap in universal suffrage has been worrisome.

The study affirms a new dimension to the general elections regarding how gender was mainstreamed across stakeholders and processes. However, it revealed that these changes have not led to the election of a significant number of women (an expected outcome of such mainstreaming effort), which suggests that more remains to be done.

There are many obstacles that have obstructed women's advancement in politics. Of these, the study finds that discriminatory attitudes among political party members, exclusion from masculinised internal power structures, poor communication networks, limited financial means, and a lack of balance between work and family life are prevalent. As a result, women are under-represented in electoral processes and political and party leadership roles, despite the massive turnout of women during elections. Women's ability to participate in the electoral process at all stages is severely harmed by increased care commitments, which are reinforced by societal notions of a 'woman's role'. Directly addressing these concerns is challenging. One measure that could assist is for male counterparts to improve their commitment to caregiving obligations, levelling the playing field and emphasising that family is a major concern for everyone.

Furthermore, the frequent media portrayal of women in ways that have nothing to do with leadership, politics, or elections must be addressed. Much is expected of the media in reporting untoward electoral practices and holding those responsible to account (Oladapo, Atela & Agbalajobi 2021). Media reforms must encourage literacy programmes about the hazards of cultural norms and negative gender stereotypes, as well as monitoring election fairness in areas where election violence has disproportionately harmed women.

Other areas that saw relatively high levels of women's participation include election campaigns and the management of election activities at party level. However, these were not considered in this study due to paucity of data and time constraints. The study lauds how INEC's Gender Policy seems to have influenced the percentages of women representatives as election officials towards the 35%

affirmative action benchmark in both case-study states. However, beyond these, lessons from the data confirms that more attention needs to be paid to a gender mainstreaming policy guiding administrative processes, rather than political processes.

Post-election evaluation exercises usually undertaken by electoral commissions, international organisations and observers are frequently used to examine the impact of elections on men and women, as well as their respective levels of involvement. The proportion of women among newly elected authorities, candidates, electoral officials and polling officers, as well as sex-disaggregated turnout rates, are useful factors in post-election evaluations. In addition, these evaluations can assist in identifying barriers to women's participation, finding opportunities for improvement and proposing reforms to promote women's significant inclusion.

Challenges that still need to be addressed by the reforms therefore include voter apathy among women; the small number of women who contested elections and won; election-related violence which must have informed women's security concerns during the elections; continued evidence of electoral fraud and lack of transparency among electoral officials; and the limited capacity of relevant institutions to address the complaints of women candidates/voters after elections. Future studies may also interrogate political parties' level of commitment to mainstreaming gender with reference to their internal democracies.

Although the electoral commission and political parties have implemented a variety of reforms to boost women's participation, (including quotas at all levels, particularly in governing boards, executive committees, and other decision-making platforms), overcoming these barriers has not been as successful since it has not translated to a significant increase in women's political representation. This implies that mainstreaming gender has no effect if women's participation in politics does not translate to significant numbers and influence at the top.

Overall, rather than taking the unidirectional perspective of analysing women's participation in elections, a multidirectional view of Nigeria's 2019 elections shows noticeable improvements in gender awareness and interest in politics across electoral processes. Nevertheless, the dividends of such gender mainstreaming are still far-fetched because more attention has been paid to physical mainstreaming, to the detriment of effectual mainstreaming. Since gender disparity in election systems does not have a one-size-fits-all answer, voter education must bring women from the margins of politics to the centre.

In conclusion, there is a need for a more holistic study on women's inclusion in secondary electoral processes, aside from studying appointive and elective positions. This approach, we argue, is the more logical way to discover how progressive or retrogressive Nigeria has been, in gendered parlance, and to

prescribe pragmatic approaches to more gender-sensitive and successful elections as Nigeria looks towards the coming 2023 general elections.

Disclaimer

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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