

Insecurity and Women Political Participation in 2019 General Elections in Nigeria

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Abstract: Election security is a key consideration in structuring electoral process and for smooth and robust participation during elections. The 2019 general elections have been conducted amidst various security threats. As in the previous elections, cases of electoral insecurity such as killing, maiming, intimidation, molestation, hijacking of electoral materials, interferences by security agents and systematic manipulation of the party's structure in favour of men were the hallmarks of the election. While other nations of the world are witnessing increased women representation, the reverse appears to be the case in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this paper interrogated the implications of the spate of insecurity during the elections on the participation of women and their emergence into the elected and coordinated positions in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Employing descriptive model of electoral violence, the study argues that the quest by women to actualise 35% affirmative right action is hindered by the rise in militarization of the electoral process by the men. Through organized and established violence in elections and the failure of the security community to police the elections in Nigeria, many women were scared away always from participating actively in the electoral processes, thereby, leading to under-representation of women in elective positions. The study recommends the use of legislation to attain proportion representation in Nigeria and amendment of Electoral Act to provide for strict punishment for electoral violence and offenders.

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INTRODUCTION

Elections in Nigeria form a critical part of her nascent democracy. However, development of the electioneering process is still being hindered by fallouts from several years of colonial rules and by the influence of the military

that spanned for about three decades. Going with is a high level of aggression among the members of the political class which became so, widespread accepted into our electoral polity as if it is an integral part of our political culture. Aligned with it is the fact that preparing for elections by the state, especially the Election Management

Body (Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC) is in the words of Jega^[1], akin to preparing for war. While some blame it to the culture of violence known with and adopted from the long time of military rule^[2], others blame it in the seeming unwilling of the people in political positions to relinquish their holds to what has become a lucrative business for most of them^[3].

Thus, Nkwachukwu^[4] provides us with explanations on why the elections in Nigeria are often volatile. He anchored it on four issues; the nature of Nigerian politics which is anchored “largely on privatization of the state to the benefit of personal and sectional interests”^[4]; the existing communal tensions among the people of Nigeria^[4] which are also manipulated for political gains by the politicians. Attached to this position, BudgIT^[5] noted that the history of elections in Nigeria has been characterized by threats to statehood based on the manipulation of ethnic groups as a divisive mechanism for the acquisition of political power by political actors; the fragile nature of political cum democratic institutions is acquainted with poor democratic culture among Nigerian citizen. The other factor is the existence of an army of unemployed and under-employed persons that provide the services of generating and sustaining crisis in the polity^[6]. Nwanegbo, etc. explains that if the army of youths in Nigeria properly channels their energy, consolidation of democracy and development would be achieved while non-positive use of the youths in their energy opens them up for negative use which hinders democracy and by that development. Finally, according to Nkwachukwu is the inability of the state to adequately secure the electoral process^[3]. This as he explained arose from the failure of the state to prevent or punish people involved mass violence ostensibly as a result of corruption and poor governance. This weakness of the security and law enforcement in Nigeria is manifest in the inability of the security agencies to control crimes of all forms, ranging from banditry and illicit armed groups, cultism and flow of small arms in the society. From whichever explanation, the bottom line is that there appear to be general acceptance to the fact that violence occur as a result of insecurity during our elections.

Elections in Nigeria from 1999 to date have continued to recycle in vicious violence and unimaginable manipulation, especially from the political elites and this has attracted the attention of the local and international community. The violence coupled with the glaring disorganized manual election process has made participation in the elections very difficult, especially for the weak and vulnerable. In the records of BudgIT^[5] it has discouraged a sizeable number of citizens from participating in the political process, especially women^[5].

Globally, women constitute over half of the world's population and contribute in vital ways to general development of the society^[7]. In most societies, women assume five key roles: mother, producer, home-manager, community organizer and socio-cultural and political activists. Of these roles mentioned, the last has been engendered by women movements attributed to historical gender discrimination and inequality. In line with global trend, Nigerian women constitute nearly half of the population of the country. But despite the population of women in the society, their roles are still not noticed, especially in politics. This according to Oluyemi^[8] is due to cultural stereotypes, religious abuse, traditional practices and patriarchal societal structures. Especially in politics, lots of opinions have attributed it to violence, insecurity and the masculine nature of our political process generally.

In Nigeria, about 51% of women are involved in voting during elections. Despite these, women are still under represented in both elective and appointive positions^[8]. Available statistics revealed that overall, political representation in government of Nigeria as at 2010 was <7%^[7] and it is progressively reducing. This shows that Nigeria has not attained 30% affirmative as prescribed by the Beijing Platform of Action.

Women's minimal participation in Nigeria has multi-dimensional implications for the democratic project in Nigeria and for the continuing quest for gender equality^[9]. The 2019 general elections were the sixth consecutive general elections since the beginning of the fourth republic in 1999. This ought to mark what is undoubtedly a measure of democratic progress, if only for conducting periodic elections since the return to civil rule. What remains deeply in doubt, however, is how inclusive this progress has been and, in particular, to what extent women have benefitted from the seeming opening of democratic requirement of equality and fairness. As gender issues and women's political and economic empowerment take centre stage on the global arena, Nigeria appears intent on maintaining its position at the bottom of the ladder of women's political empowerment. Nigeria has been recording low participation of women in both elective and appointive positions this is a growing concern to many Nigerians. According to Nwankwor and Nkereuwem^[9], 2018 data show that women's rates of participation in formal decision making remain one of the lowest on the continent and across the world with women occupying an abysmal 5.6% (86 out of 1534) of all elective positions at both the national and sub-national levels and this according to BudgIT^[5] has being of a great worry to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This is quite far from the situation in most countries as the global statistics for gender parity indicates that in 2015, of 188 countries, Nigeria was 152nd in the Human Development Index in Gender

Inequality and 118th out of 192 countries in 2017. Although, there appear to be a growing number of women representations in political positions, this is still far below the Beijing declaration of 30% affirmative right for women, suggesting that more need to be done.

Looking at the growing trend of insecurity during elections in Nigeria and the spate of reduction in active participation of women in political position this paper commits to finding out how the spate of insecurity affected women's participation in 2019 general elections in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

Election security and elections in Nigeria: Security as a word has different dimensions in psychology, public safety, defense and military matters, information etc. although, it's usage in different disciplines could mean different things, overall, it's meaning is "to protect" and "to provide maximum protection for certain people, things and their environment"^[10]. It could also be seen as safety from harm; the degree of resistance to, or protection from harm. It applies to any vulnerable and valuable asset, such as a person, community, nation or organization. Despite that we are only concerned with security during election; it is still pertinent to acknowledge the fact that it is used in other areas like computer security, data security, information security, human security, personal security, national security, financial security, to mention but few.

Security is considered key to both people's participation and the overall tranquility of the electoral process. As further explained by Nwanegbo^[11], it should constitute one of the primary motivations for people's participation in elections in Nigeria as the presence or absence of security operatives assures people of their safety in the polls considering the level of violence that characterizes elections in the country. Electoral security can be defined as "...the process of protecting electoral stakeholders such as voters, candidates, poll workers, media and observers; electoral information such as vote results, registration data and campaign material; electoral facilities such as polling stations and counting centers; and electoral events such as campaign rallies against death, damage or disruption". Explaining further, Fischer identified from a broad perspective, four kinds of electoral security (and associated targets); physical security, personal security, information security and electoral events.

Physical security is concerned with the protection of facilities and materials such as the electoral commission buildings and offices, registration and polling stations; political party offices; election observer offices and media organizations, houses and vehicles of election officials

and candidates, etc. Personal security focuses on electoral stakeholders including voters, public officials, election workers, security forces, candidates, party agents, election observers and media representatives with special attention to gender, age and ethnicity of human targets. Information security on the other hand concerns protection of computers and communication systems employed in voter registration and vote tabulation as well as associated sensitive election materials such as voted and un-voted ballots and voter registration lists. Electoral events on its own covers issues such as voter registration programs or election day activities, campaign rallies, debates and political party and coalition meetings, etc.

Several stages and components of the elections require security to operate. Indeed, in all its stages of preparation for election (covering the period of exercise of voter's registration, party primaries, pre and post primaries' litigations, period of party campaigns), election proper and the post-election activities which in Nigeria hardly ends until another election period, etc. During election proper, the security agencies on electoral duties have a responsibility of ensuring that peaceful conditions are maintained at the polling and counting centers during elections and citizen's exercise of their franchise is carried out without fear of coercion, intimidation, violence or manipulation and also protection of lives and properties of the citizenry^[12]. The duties/responsibilities of the security agencies include: alertness, approachability, maintenance of impartiality, fairness, use of force when necessary to restore peace and order, communication with superior and commanders during elections, awareness of electoral law, reporting, cooperation and collaboration with other electoral officers in democratic process becomes very vital for the achievement of free and fair elections (Daily Sun Monday, March 28, 2011). The presence of security agencies during elections are also meant to avert any possible occurrence of electoral violations and human rights abuses.

The constitutional roles of security agencies in Nigeria during election are quite germane. Electoral security in Nigeria is primarily handled by police. In other words, the police are primarily saddled with the responsibility of making sure that people exercise their voting rights in an orderly manner with the help of other paramilitary organizations. It is indeed only on extreme situation of uncontrollable security breach capable of challenging national security that the military can be called. Elections are generally accepted in all climes as the hallmark of democracy and participation in elections forms part of the fundamental human right of citizens in such democratic societies^[13]. According to Agbalajobi and Ayodeji^[14], elections are supposed to be competitive, free and fair and in which the ability of the elected representatives to exercise decision-making power is

subject to the rule of law and usually curbed by a constitution that emphasizes the protection of the rights and freedoms of individuals and which places checks on the leaders and on the extent to which the will of the majority can be exercised against the rights of minorities. Despite the legal framework that guides the electoral process, there is usually a contest between those who want to acquire power and those who are likely to lose power which usually results to violence during the electoral process. This prompted Jega^[1] to aver that election in Nigeria is characterized with intimidation and political thuggery^[1].

Electoral violence has been described as the greatest enemy of democracy, being the bane of Nigeria's march to democratic consolidation^[15]. Democracy in Nigeria, especially the conduct of elections, has always been characterized by doubt, uncertainty and fears for the safety of people's lives and property. Conflict ridden situations have historically featured in all elections conducted in Nigeria since the 1950s. Hence, issues surrounding the electioneering processes potentially relate to security challenges such as violence and violations of the rights of individuals. Thus, rather than serve as a means and a process of exercising legitimate political rights, elections in Nigeria have since, independence, turned out to be a serious political liability; causing serious political turmoil and threatening the survival of corporate Nigeria.

Particularly, these security challenges which manifest in the form of electoral violence that characterised Nigerian elections since independent^[15] have had very serious repressive effects on participation of women in Elections. Different studies have captured in their reports that gender based violence are replete in the democratic history of Nigeria, deepening security challenges during elections that has affected women since the 1965 general elections. For instance, Orji and Uzodi^[16], explained that the 2011 post-election violence resulted in the rape, gang rape and defilement of several unspecified number of female Corps Members by protesters across the Northern region. Pre-election violence has led to the death of many women supporters and innocent citizens. Likewise, election in Nigeria is characterized with intimidation and political thuggery^[1]. Similarly, most Nigerians and in particular women political aspirants and other participants were apprehensive about their security and concerns about the capacity of the police force to offer them protection in the just concluded 2019 general elections. This prompted Agbalajobi and Ayodeji^[14] to conclude that insecurity such as electoral violence is one of the major factors that limit women's political participation in Nigeria.

This positions aligns with the extant literature and theoretical positions that under situation of insecurity,

people tend to withdraw from participating in social activities, especially such that can expose them to danger. Moreso, is that applicable to the female members of the political societies that are naturally controlled by notable factors like, their nature which makes them scared of violence; the society that demands their attention at their homes; their family (husband and children) that would not understand seeing their wives and mother at the heat of violence, etc.^[3]. Therefore, the constant violence and failure of the security system to protect individual participants in politics has high tendency to keep women away from active and serious participation, in such magnitude that men are engaged on in the rough terrain of Nigerian politics.

SECURITY CHALLENGES TO 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Nigeria's elections have historically been fraught with controversy, violence and other abuses with the 2015 elections, widely believed to have been largely free of violence, bucking this trend. However, this was not the case as the 2019 elections were marred by voter intimidation and violence at both the federal and state levels, including by armed men hired by candidates and political parties and by security forces including the national police^[6]. The politically related violence reported in many states was in contrast to the relatively peaceful 2015 elections that brought Buhari into office 2015. The national and state elections in February, March and April 2019 contributed to the general insecurity across the country. According to a report by SBM Intelligence, 626 people were killed during the 2019 election cycle, starting with campaigns in 2018^[6].

The deaths and violence that trailed the 2019 elections left a sour taste in observers' mouths. Onwuka^[17] reported that while voting was still ongoing, media was awash with death of as many as 40 people. Different sources reported that as many as 30 people could have been killed in Rivers State, three in Kogi State; two in Bayelsa State; two in Delta State and one in Oyo State. The dead included civilians shot by soldiers, political thugs and politicians shot by political thugs and unknown assassins. One was an ad hoc electoral officer recruited from the National Youth Service Corps. However, the death that was most touching was that of the 19-year-old Daniel Usman, a student of Kogi State University who was reportedly shot dead while voting for the first time. Hours before his death, he had made a post on Facebook which read "Vote and not fight! Respect Yourself and stay out of trouble... GOD BLESS NIGERIA"^[17].

HRW.^[6] reported that states like Bauchi, Benue, Kano, Sokoto, Plateau and Rivers were particularly

affected by violence during the March 9 gubernatorial elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission canceled elections in places where the elections were disrupted and held supplementary elections later. Kano state had supplementary elections on March 23 and Rivers state on April 13. Kano and Rivers states were probably the worst hit of the six states identified by both local and international analysts ahead of the elections as holding great potential for electoral violence. Both are major political strongholds for the two leading political parties, Buhari's ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP). Abdullahi Ganduje of the APC won the 2019 election in Kano and Nyesom Wike of the PDP won in Rivers state. In Lagos State, thugs invaded areas that are dominated by another ethnic group and destroyed electoral materials, telling the voters to go back to their states of origin to vote. In Akwa Ibom, electoral officers were abducted; many of them were members of the NYSC.

Worse still, the election period included persistent attacks by factions of the insurgent group Boko Haram in the northeast; increased communal violence between nomadic herdsman and farmers spreading southward from north-central states and a dramatic up-tick in banditry, kidnaping and killings in the northwestern states of Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara. Security forces have failed to respond effectively to threats to people's lives and security. The lack of meaningful progress in addressing the prevalent political violence as well as lack of accountability for rights abuses, marked both the pre-election, elections day and post-election^[6]. Human Rights Watch interviewed 32 people including voters, journalists, election observers, activists and Independent National Electoral Commission officials in Rivers and Kano states and documented 11 deaths specifically related to violent interference in the election process during the February 23 presidential election and subsequent state elections. These killings and maiming of lives and destruction of property scare women away from participating in election.

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN ELECTORAL POSITIONS IN NIGERIA (1999-2019)

For more than five decades, the terms of the competition for electoral offices in Nigeria have been established by men. As Chapman by Agbalajobi^[7] maintained: 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 competing among themselves.

Table 1: Aggregate percentage of women elected into elective offices (1999-2019)

Election years	Women representation (%)
1999	3.0
2003	4.5
2007	7.0
2011	4.1
2015	5.7
2019	4.2

Okoronkwo-Chukwu^[18] and BudgIT^[5]

Over the years, there have been marginal increase in women participation and representation in elective positions in Nigeria. However, the number of women the eventually clinch the positions is considerably very low. The data in Table 1 show low representation of women in elective offices when compared to men. The ratio which was 3% in 1999 rose by more than double to 7% in 2007, however, the gains achieved was short lived as 2011 witnessed sharp decline in women representation in elective positions to 4.1% but increased slightly in 2015 to 5.7%. The expectation was that women will consolidate on the gain made in 2015. Unfortunately, the number of women elected to public offices in Nigeria in the just concluded 2019 general elections decline sharply to 4.2%. This suggests a decline in the progresses made by women's previous outings since the inception of the fourth republic.

The number of women representation in various elective offices, since, 2003-2019 also reflects declining women representation in Nigeria (Table 2). The data in Table 2 shows that no female ever clinched the offices of president and governor since the inception of the fourth republic. Of the 109 Senate seats in Nigeria, the highest women have ever grabbed was 9(8.26%) in 2007 which later dropped to 7(6.42%) since 2011 even until 2019. Out of the 360 House of Representative members, women were only able to occupied 25(6.98%) and 22(6.10%) seats respectively in 2007 and 2015. However, these numbers declined to 11(3.05%) in 2019. In the 36 States House of Assembly, the number of women members also decreased. From 68(6.9%) in 2011, it dropped to 55(5.55%) and 54(5.45%) in 2015 and 2007, respectively and further decreased to 40(4.04%) in 2019 election.

The performance of female candidates in elective positions in the 2019 election shows that 235 women, forming 12.34% of candidates, contested for slots in the Senate of which seven (6.42%) were elected (Table 3). This remained constant in the 8th Senate which also accounted for 6.42% of the total number of elected senators. In the House of Representatives, 533 women contested with the major parties fielding a total of 31(15 APC and 16 PDP) candidates. However, only 11(3.05%) were elected. The figures from the 8th House have thus been halved as it had 22 female lawmakers. At the state level, no woman was elected governor. They formed 3.07% of the total candidates. Of the 275 women forming

Table 2: Women representation in various elective offices (2003-2019)

Position	Available seat	No. of women elected				
		2003	2007	2011	2015	2019
Presidency	1	0	0	0	0	0
Senate	109	3(2.27%)	9(8.26%)	7 (6.42%)	7(6.42%)	7(6.42%)
House of Reps	360	21(5.83%)	25(6.98%)	12(3.33%)	22(6.10%)	11(3.05%)
Governorship	36	0	0	0	0	0
State House of Assembly	990	38(3.84%)	54(5.45%)	68(6.90%)	55(5.55%)	40(4.04%)

Agbalajobi^[7] and BudgIT^[5]

Table 3: Gender segregation by political offices aspired by the contestants in the 2019 general elections

Position	Female	Male	Total contestants
President	6(8%)	67(92%)	73(100%)
Vice President	22(31%)	51(69%)	73 (100%)
Senate	234(12.3%)	1669(87.7%)	1903(100%)
House of representative	511(10.9%)	4192(89.1%)	4703(100%)
Gubernatorial	80(7.5%)	984(92.5%)	1064(100%)
Grand total	853(10.9%)	6.963(89.1%)	7.816(100%)

BudgIT^[5]

11.40% of candidates for the Deputy Governorship, four (in Enugu, Kaduna, Ogun and Rivers) were elected. Thus, the number of female deputy governors has declined from 6 in the 2015-19 to 4. While women have consistently held the position of deputy governor in Lagos State, the emergence of Obafemi Hamzat as deputy-governor elect marked a departure from the past. Down from 55 female state lawmakers in the incumbent regime, our preliminary analysis shows that 40 women have been elected into the state assembly.

It is an irony that despite the fact that women constitute 49.4% of Nigeria's population^[5], women political representation in the 2019 elections was negligible, relative to the approximately half of the population they constitute with only 2,970 women on the electoral ballot, representing only 11.36% of nominated candidates^[19]. Trends in women's marginalisation have shown disturbing reversion in some of the gains women have made in past elections. This reduction is typified by the reduction in 2019 of the number of women in elective and appointive positions as at 2007 and 2011. Nwankwor and Nkereuwem^[9] while lamenting the declining representation of women in elective positions in Nigeria averred that: this negative trend is set to replicate itself in 2019 elections going by the intentional or unintentional exclusion of women's participation and voice in high stakes discussion of politics in Nigeria. Once again, gender and women's issues fail to move the needle of the national discourse with themes of insecurity, the economy and corruption dominating the debates. Perhaps, the sidelining of women is now worsened by Mrs Ezekwesili's withdrawal from the presidential contest.

The sudden withdrawal of female presidential front-runner, Oby Ezekwesili, from the 2019 elections barely one month to the polls threw into disarray rising gender equality discourse, particularly the hope that this election would place women squarely on the map of internal party negotiation and political power contestation

which her candidacy had inspired. Although, she was just one of the 6 females among the 73 presidential candidates, her candidature was significant insofar as she was a direct repudiation of the gendered narratives that portray women candidates as incompetent and unable to compete in the world of politics. Her withdrawal, therefore, highlights women's continued marginalisation in electoral processes in Nigeria, both in terms of participation in electoral offices and as beneficiaries of the dividends of democracy. While women make up 47% of registered voters for the 2019 elections, only 8% were cleared to vie for electoral positions in 2019 presidential elections. Furthermore, all 6 women presidential candidates have withdrawn their candidacy and will not be standing for elections with their male counterparts even though their names remain on the ballot box. Nwankwor and Nkereuwem^[9] concluded that by all indications, women remain a significant minority in elective offices in the just concluded 2019 elections.

The most important political seat after the Presidency is the Legislature because of their important role of enacting laws for the good governance of the country. However, with more men in the 9th National Assembly, laws affecting issues of gender will always remain under-discussed. The general believe among female politicians in Nigeria is that if more women are elected into the National Assembly, they will encourage and help in making laws against most of the problems retarding their participation in political offices. The 9th National Assembly which has only 7 female Senators out of the 109 Senators and 11 House of Representative members out of the 360 members represents a serious setback to the quest for 30% affirmative right for women and the National Gender Policy that came into existence on 15 August 2008 with the promise of providing women 35% affirmative action. The 9th National Assembly, thus has serious work to do in order to ensure that gender equality bill is passed to enhance women participation in elective offices.

The dismal performance of women in the 2019 general elections (both the new entrants and those that were already occupying elective offices before 2019) indicates that a lot have to be done if they must effectively transcend political power in Nigeria. Various reasons have been adduced for the poor outing of women in the 2019 election. According to Onyeji^[19], some female candidates who contested the elections identified lack of funds, poor party structure and 'stereotyping' as some of the challenges women faced in the just concluded 2019 election. However, reasons for the poor outing of women in the 2019 elections were mostly attributed to the country's political structure. The two major parties were accused of not allowing women 'enough space'. This assertion was supported by Onyeji^[19]. He observed that women were not given even playing field, especially by the major parties APC and the PDP and this eventually led to the low number of women who emerged as party candidates. Mrs Oby Ezekwesili in an interview with PREMIUM TIMES asserted that "female aspirants were either intimidated or threatened to step down or were simply screened out and replaced with their male competitors"^[19]. The former minister maintained that the dominant political parties of the (APC and PDP) elite "have entrenched a primaries system that inherently makes the emergence of women candidates near impossible." Away from party politics, other factors that played against women were large scale election violence, threats, rigging and vote buying^[5].

Election security challenges and women participation:

The credibility of and consequently the acceptability of election's outcomes in Nigeria have been contentious and litigious because of the inability secure such elections both in terms of pre-election, election day and post-election processes^[20]. The failures of security agencies to secure elections often led to political crises and governance failures with frequent interruptions of the democratic governance through military interventions. For instance, it is on record that the controversial elections of 1964 and 1965 led to the coup de tat of January 1966 and the flawed election of 1983 produced the military coup of December 31, 1983 and the annulment of June 12, 1993 elections by the Babangida regime brought about the emergence of a fickle interim government that was declared illegal by a Federal High Court and shortly afterwards toppled by the Abacha palace coup.

Insecure, undemocratic or rigged elections are, therefore, a negation of the known basic democratic tenets and indeed a conclusive evidence of the absence of democracy^[20]. They are usually characterized by all forms of electoral mal-practices and irregularities such as the manipulation of the laws and processes guiding the conduct of elections to suit particular outcomes and constraining the access of some participants particularly

women and the resources at their disposal to reach voters for campaign purposes prior to election day, as well as stuffing of ballot boxes with ballot papers well ahead of actual voting. Seizure of or hoarding of electoral materials; manipulation and fabrication of electoral results and the use of law enforcement agencies to intimidate, maim and disenfranchise eligible voters, as well as the killing of political opponents particularly vulnerable group like women on election day or before^[20]. In addition, to manipulating the post-election judiciary processes to obviate or distort just outcomes that should reflect the will of voters as expressed in the ballots are other forms of electoral fraud. Obviously, fundamental deficits inherent in Nigerian elections can be linked to factors related to security challenges or insecure election. Electoral insecurity breeds violence that undermines women participation in the electoral processes which results in under-representation of women in elective positions.

The causes of Nigeria's manifold security deficiencies are rooted deep within the fabric of the state (government security structures such as the police) or non-state mechanisms (militant and terrorist groups) competing and overlapping each other. The most prominent have been the terrorist attacks by Islamist militant groups like Boko Haram, most notably in the north-eastern states of Yobe, Kano, Bauchi, Borno and Kaduna^[21]. North Central Nigeria is engulfed with land resource contestation between farmers and herdsmen in the middle belt, in the geographical centre and in the south eastern region. In the South East and South are the lingering longstanding conflict with the Biafran Separatist Movement that is fueled by environmental problems due to the oil production. Those security challenges have forced millions of people to leave their ancestral home and change their modes of living, whether within the borders or beyond. Additionally, the absence of job opportunities for the teeming youths coupled with insufficient investments in health, education and power infrastructures further weaken the economic and social outlook for the inhabitants of the rest of the country. Unfortunately, the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) government could not initiate fundamental improvements of the living conditions for the population.

VIOLENCE AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

Gender related violence is rooted in prescribed behaviour, norms and attitudes that define what it means to be a woman or a man and how men and women are positioned vis-à-vis one another. These norms define, allow and even encourage violent behaviour within environments that assign privilege and hierarchical power

to certain groups of men. Gender related violence, therefore, is 'the enforcement of power hierarchies and structural inequalities created and sustained by belief systems, cultural norms and socialization processes'^[22]. Understanding gender relations is therefore critical to knowing why women are being violated and ways to end violence against women.

In Nigeria, the dominant culture is patriarchal and gendered division of labour and power whereby men are traditionally and culturally legitimized as the head of the home. In some way, whatever treatment a man gives a woman even if violent, especially within a family is endured and accepted. Women's role at best is considered primarily to support their male counterparts. When women want to go out of their way to do what is 'traditionally' seen as the men's domain, violence is then used by men as a means to maintain their egos likewise to intimidate, subdue or control the women folk. Power inequality between women and men is therefore a prime cause of sexual and gender-related violence. Women's perceived subordinate social, economic and legal status in different settings often makes it difficult for them to get help once violence occurs.

The political scenario in Nigeria is known to be for the bold and tough people that can freely participate in active party politics^[23]. Related to the above, it is generally difficult for women to swim in the murky waters of Nigerian politics^[24]. Fear of all forms of physical and non-physical violence is thus one of the reasons most cited by women political aspirants as their major obstacle in electoral politics. Furthermore, the branding of politics as a dirty game is yet another factor that discourages a lot of women from even attempting to join electoral politics. This thought alone can cause psychological violence to the women as their 'feminine' trait is characterized as being gentle, soft-spoken and motherly.

Gender related electoral violence is primarily directed to women as a result of their aspirations to seek political office, their link to political activities or simply their commitment to vote. Okumu^[25] referred to political violence against women as 'political rape'. From his perspective, political rape occurs when men subdue women due to their ego and when women try to get what traditionally or naturally is mostly acquired by the men, violence is used to intimidate or control them^[25]. Some of them are pressured to step down in favour of a male candidate and could be victims of threats and physical violence. Though violence is equally used against male aspirants by their fellow men, they have greater effects on women aspirants.

Despite the fact that some political parties' constitutions and manifestos showed the inclusion of gender-friendly provisions, they are not well respected^[26]. In party primaries, women were not able to compete on a

level playing field with their male counterparts. The 'do-or-die' nature of politics in Nigeria is hardly veiled and threats are made intermittently to warn opponents that when push comes to shove, the side with the monopoly of violence will carry the day. The spate of politically motivated killings has not helped matters, especially in the historical trend of Nigeria as a democratic country. Looking at the trend of electoral violence in Nigeria, it is obvious that violence can be said to be a major cause of low political participation among women.

CONCLUSION

The number of women representation in various elective offices, since, 2003-2019 has reflected declining women representation in Nigeria. While many countries across the globe are making conscious efforts to bridge inequalities between men and women in the political space, Nigeria has kept falling short even when women constitute almost half of the voting population. Women constitute 49.4% of Nigeria's population. Female political representation in the 2019 elections was negligible relative to the approximately half of the population they constitute. Out the 84 million registered voters that voted in the 2019 elections, women accounted for almost 40 million (47.14%). Notwithstanding this population advantage, the total number of women elected into political offices keeps diminishing with only 2,970 women on the electoral ballot, representing only 11.36% of nominated candidates. Worse still, of the 11.36% women that were successful at the primaries, only 4.2% were elected. This shows a shortfall of 1.5% from 5.7% political representation attained by women in 2015 elections. Several factors have been adduced for this shortfall. Notably, the quest by men to hold onto power at all cost remains a factor that downplays the quest for gender inclusiveness in political processes. To maintain the status quo, they employed the instrument of violence.

For instance, in party primaries, women were not able to compete on a level playing field with their male counterparts. The 'do-or-die' nature of politics in Nigeria is hardly veiled and threats are made intermittently to warn opponents that when push comes to shove, the side with the monopoly of violence will carry the day. The spate of politically motivated killings has not helped matters, especially in the historical trend of Nigeria as a democratic country. Election related violence as a result of insecurity attacks the very soul and heart of modern day representative democracy which has resulted in restricted, inactive and low participation of the citizenry particularly women in the decision making process of the political system. Though this ugly and frightening phenomenon is a bane to full and active participation of Nigerians in the electoral process, women because of the

socio-biological and traditional make-up is the worse victims of election related violence. Looking at the trend of electoral insecurity in Nigeria, it is obvious that violence can be said to be a major cause of low political participation among women.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been put forward: the federal government should demonstrate political will to bring Nigeria at par with other countries that have achieved 30% affirmative right action for women in political representation through the instrument of legislation. Sound legislation remains the best way to achieve the 35% affirmative action for women. For instance, in Senegal, legislation was used to achieve 30% affirmative action for women before the move for parity (50:50). With legislation, political parties can be compelled to reserve specific quotas for women, since, it is the only platform through which candidates can aspire to political offices.

It is also imperative that women advocate groups change their approach of begging males for palliative such as appointive positions to vigorously championing the need for amendment of relevant sections of the laws that will create a favourable environment for more women involvement in the elective and representative politics of the Nigerian state. They should learn from the experience of their counterparts in Uganda and Rwanda, two African countries where women fought and achieved increased women's representation by making their governments adopt a proportional representative electoral system which is more conducive to women's representation in political decision making.

Electoral security is a sine-quo-non for gender inclusive and participatory election. Government must device effective ways of nipping in the bud issues of insecurity before, during and after elections. The security agents must be proactive in securing electoral actors and materials before, during and after elections. They must also maintain absolute neutrality in election matters.

The National Assembly should take a second look at the Electoral Act as it concerns punishment for electoral violence with the view to giving it more bite. Section 98 of the 2010 Electoral Act which stipulates the punishment for offences listed on Section 97 of the same Act is too lenient on offenders and thus needs to be amended to reflect a weightier punishment. It is high time election offenders are made to face the full consequences of their offences in the most deterrent way. The culture of impunity in the legal system and law enforcement agencies as a result of their inability to arrest, prosecute and convict offenders involved in violence against women encourages sexual crimes and other forms of violence.

The civil society represented by several civil liberty organisations, especially women's rights advocate groups must enlighten and mobilize Nigerians to the Nigerian political system to put in place stiff electoral laws that will make electoral fraud and violence, a heinous crime against the citizenry and state. If there is going to be any hope for a more female gender friendly political environment as a platform for sustainable democracy in Nigeria, politicians found guilty of electoral fraud and violence as well as all those that benefitted from it one way or the other should no longer be treated with kid gloves and palliatives. They must be made to face stringent and long lasting penalties and sanctions. It is hoped that this measure will serve as deterrence against any form of political lawlessness and violence as well as creating a more conducive and gender friendly environment for full and active involvement of women in the decision making process of the Nigerian state.

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