

Women's Representation in Governance in the Nigerian Fourth Republic: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract. Gender equality has been identified by the UN as central to attaining sustainable development. Women, who constitute about half of the global population, are believed to possess the administrative skills and leadership traits needed to solve developmental problems and bring about the desired development. Despite the government policy of 35% representation of women in governance, representation in Nigeria has remained low (about 6%) at all levels since the inception of the Fourth Republic. Factors associated with the low representation, according to scholars, include lack of funds, cultural constraints, and discrimination, among others. This study, using feminine theory, seeks to investigate the challenge of women's representation in governance in Nigeria between 2015 to 2023. A mixed method approach was used to examine the constraints to women's representation and what can be done to stem the tides of low representation of women in governance in Nigeria. Primary data were analysed with statistical tools such as bar charts and simple percentages while qualitative data were analysed descriptively. The study recommends reservation of certain positions for women, provision of special funds for women in politics, and eradication of violence, and money politics while electoral laws should be amended to prevent unholy party practices.

Key Words: Development, Governance, Leadership, Representation, Women

Introduction

The low level of women's participation in governance has become a global concern. This is informed by the recognition of the need for empowerment and inclusion of women in the policy process as a major key for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals. Women have been at the receiving end in developmental indices such as poverty, standard of living, inequality, and literacy, among others. For instance, the poverty gap of 122 women for 100 men, especially between ages 25 to 34 was revealed by UN Women (2022). The factors for the gap were attributed to raising children and the household care affecting women's jobs. Worst still, 62.8% of extremely poor women out of 168 countries are in Sub-Saharan Africa (UN Women, 2022). Various high health challenges have been identified confronting 40 million Nigerian women between ages 15 and 49 (UNICEF, accessed 2023). Nigerian pregnant women were reported as ten percent (10%) of global deaths attributed to pregnancy complications while more girls are out of school than boys, especially in Northern Nigeria (UNICEF, 2023). Representation of women in governance has been argued, that would enable inclusive policies to address the peculiarities of women and proffer solutions which would affect overall development. Babalola (2022) and Nebo (2023) argued that women can make significant impacts in governance considering the contribution of women like Moremi of Ife, Emotan of Benin, Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo, Mrs. Ransome Kuti and Ikonjo Eweala, among others. Besides, women are noted to have the prowess needed for a strong democracy (Nebo, 2023).

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Women are needed for diverse views on policy-making for overall development (Bonkat-Jonathan, 2021).

However, it has been discovered that women who constitute about half of the global population have low representation in governance (Bonkat-Jonathan, 2021). Representation of women has been very low at every level of governance. According to UN Women (2023), only seventeen (17) countries have a woman as Head of State while nineteen (19) have a woman as the Head of Government. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women national legislators were reported to be 26% while women constitute 25% of local government deliberative bodies (UN Women, 2023). In Nigeria, women's representation is the lowest in Africa. In 2015, just 7(6.5%) of the 109 in the Senate were women while women in the House of Representatives were 22(6%) of the 360 members. In 2019, 7(6.5%) of the 109 in the Senate were women while women in the House of Representatives were 10(2.7%) of the 360 members (Dan-Azumi & Asan, 2021). Factors advanced by scholars for the low representation include financial constraints, cultural beliefs, and opposition from male counterparts among others. Bonkat-Jonathan (2021) identified a lack of support for women by political parties. This was corroborated by Babalola (2022) who noted that political parties prefer women to be "Women Leaders", Deputy Women Leaders, and Chief Women Organizers" Rather than allowing them to be part of the decision-making bodies. Hence, this study employs both primary and secondary sources to answer the following questions: What is the need for women's representation in governance? What are the factors for the low representation of women in governance? How can women's representation in governance be improved to bring about overall development? In line with the questions raised, the specific objectives of the research are to:

- i. examine the need for women's representation in governance;
- ii. investigate the factors for low representation of women in governance; and
- iii. consider strategies to be put in place to enhance women's representation in governance.

Theoretical Framework/Conceptual Clarification

Theoretical Framework

This study employs feminine theory to analyse women's representation in governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The theory originated from Plato who identified women's "natural capacities that are equal to that of men to govern and defend ancient Greece" (History.com, 2022). Others include Christine de Pizan, Margaret Cavendish, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Abigail Adams (History.com, 2022). Feminism refers to public support and belief in equal rights for women on the grounds of gender equality (Stanford Encyclopedia of Education, 2022; History.com Editors, 2022). The quest for women's rights was categorized into waves. The first was the clamour for the right to vote by women. The second wave of struggle was the fight for equal opportunities for women in education, at home, and at work. The third wave identified the need to end discrimination against racism, religious minorities, and immigrants (History.com, 2022; Pasque & Wimmer, 2021). Jones and Budig (2008) identified varieties of feminism including:

Liberal feminism posits that women are oppressed due lack of equal legal, socio-economic, and political opportunities. The liberal feminists advocated for equal rights for men and women in education, political participation, and the workplace.

Another variety is radical feminism which argues for the oppression of women in sexual matters. This group advocates against violent control of the bodies of women through objects such as the culture of patriarchy and religious belief in men's superiority over women.

Another group is the Marxist and Socialist feminism which are against the exploitation of women through family duties that attract no pay and low-cadre jobs with low pay. They

advocated for restructuring the responsibilities within the family opportunities for women to engage in education, and better economic and political opportunities for women.

This study employs the liberal feminism theory with specific relevance to political participation. Political participation covers participation in campaigns, voting, contesting for positions, and being part of the decision-making process. Women have been at the forefront of political activities such as campaigning and voting but are relegated when it comes to contesting and aspiring to occupy political positions of decision-making. The impacts and influence of women in governance can only be effective when they are represented in the decision-making bodies.

Pasque and Wimmer (2021) identified the principles of feminist theory to include:

- i. The belief that women have valuable things to offer in every facet of life to make the world better.
- ii. Women have been subdued and prevented from attaining their potential in playing their part in society.
- iii. The norms of relegating women should be changed, they should be made to take their place in society.

Feminist theory is relevant to this study. The low representation of women in governance, among other reasons, has been attributed to the relegation of women by cultural practices/patriarchy, religious beliefs, and discrimination by men. The oppression of women in governance has relegated women to clappers, campaign singers, and mere voters without needed access to political positions where policies affecting them can be influenced.

Conceptual Clarification

Women

A woman refers to an adult female human being (Collins Dictionary, 2023). In Nigeria's context, a woman can be referred to as a female of 18 years old or above. An adult, according to the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is someone who is 18 years above.

Representation

Representation, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2023), refers to the act of a person standing in place of another person to act or speak on behalf of the person. Such a one is acting to defend the rights and privileges of the other person. If women are allowed to occupy political decision-making positions, issues that affect women and children can be considered in the policy formation process and the right diagnosis can be offered to address such specific interests.

Governance

Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2023) defines governance as “the act or process of governing or overseeing the control and direction of something (such as country or organization)” while Cambridge Dictionary (2023) describes governance as a way in which a country or organization is managed. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) (accessed 2023) describes governance as “the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)”. Similarly, Governance Today (2023) describes governance as the procedure of directing and controlling an entity. The arrangement and the steps of deciding the helm of affairs are emphasized. Representatives at various levels of governance are major actors in the decision-making process. These include the President, Vice President, Governors, and Deputy Governors and Assembly members at all levels. If women are not well represented, their interests may be jeopardized in the process. UNs (2023) identified the principles of effective governance to include competence, sound policymaking, collaboration, integrity, transparency, independence oversight, leaving no one behind, non-discrimination, participation, subsidiarity, and intergenerational equity. If effective governance is realized, the place of women cannot be

underrated. Women should be well represented in governance to enable sound policy-making that is void of discrimination.

Scholars have identified low representation of women in decision-making bodies in Nigeria. Dan-Azumi and Asan (2021) noted women's representation deficit in the legislative arm, both at the State and National Assembly which is the law-making body and the executive. They revealed the same situation for ministerial positions which are political appointive posts since the 1999 Nigerian Fourth Republic. To Orji, Orji, and Aganyim (2018), the challenge of women's representation persisted due to wrong diagnoses and policies.

Methodology

The study employs both primary and secondary sources of data to analyse the low representation of women in governance in the Nigerian Fourth Republic. The scope of the study covers between 2015 to 2023. Primary data involves an online questionnaire to gather responses from Nigerian citizens who are 18 years and above. Some women in politics, who have occupied political positions in the past and are current political officeholders, were also interviewed on the subject matter of the study. Simple random sampling was used to choose the respondents to the questionnaire while interviewees were purposively chosen from women who are actively involved in politics. This is to get firsthand information from the horse's mouth. These are participants in the field of politics who have practical experience of the challenges confronting women in politics. Questionnaires were collected between 4th and 13th July 2023. There were 151 questionnaire responses as of 2 pm on 13th July 2023, though number of responses to each question varied. In addition, secondary data from books, reputable journals, newspapers, and official publications were used. Primary data were analysed, using frequencies, percentages, bar and pie charts while qualitative data were analysed descriptively.

Presentation of Data and Discussion of Findings

The following is the presentation of data on the representation of women in governance in Nigeria. Data for analysis were from both primary and secondary sources.

Representation of Women in Governance in Nigeria

Secondary data was used to show the level of women's representation in some important governing positions in Nigeria. Nigeria is yet to have any woman in the position of President, Vice President, or Governor under the period of this study. Women's representation has been zero for all these aforementioned positions.

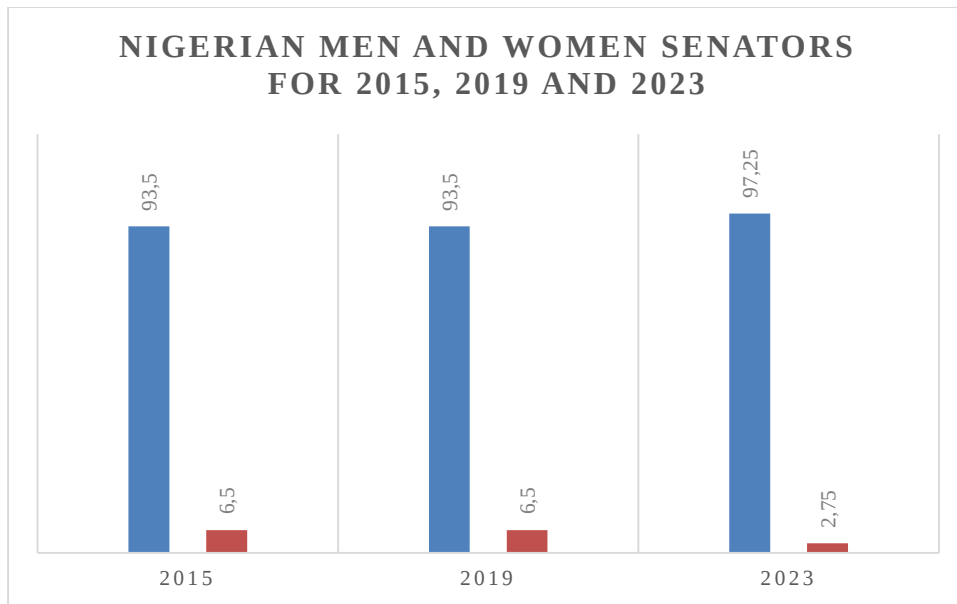


Figure 1. Differences in the Percentages of Men and Women in the Senate for 2015, 2019, and 2023

Source: Source: Dan -Azumi and Asan (2021) and Opara (2023)

The above Figure 1 shows the representation of women in the upper chamber of the National Assembly in the period under study. In 2015, there were 102(93.5%) men, and 7(6.5%) women. In 2019, there were 102(93.5%), and 7(6.5%) women while in 2023, there are 106(97.25%) men and 3 (2.75%) women. The low percentage of women to men in the upper National Assembly in the three periods has been very ridiculous and a reflection of the attendant's policy gap against women.

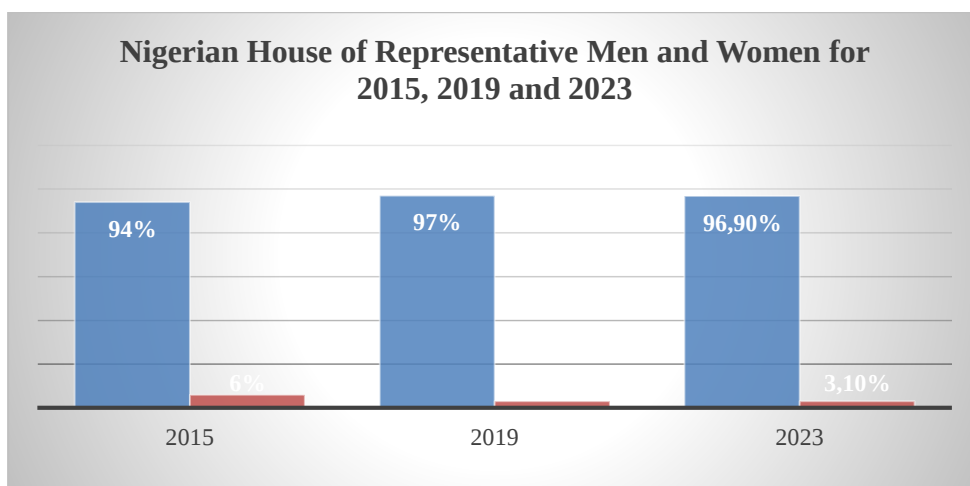


Figure 2. Differences in the Percentages of Men and Women in the House of Representatives for 2015, 2019 and 2023

Source: Source: Dan-Azumi and Asan (2021) and Opara (2023)

The above Figure 2 shows the representation of women in the second chamber of the National Assembly in the period under study. In 2015, there were 338(94%), and 22(6%) women. In 2019, there were 350(97.2%), and 10(2.7%) women while in 2023, there are 349(96.9%) men and 11(3.1%) women. The low percentage of women to men in the House of Representatives in the three periods under study shows very low representation even below

that of the upper chamber. The special interests of women cannot be well represented in the makeup of the decision-making body.

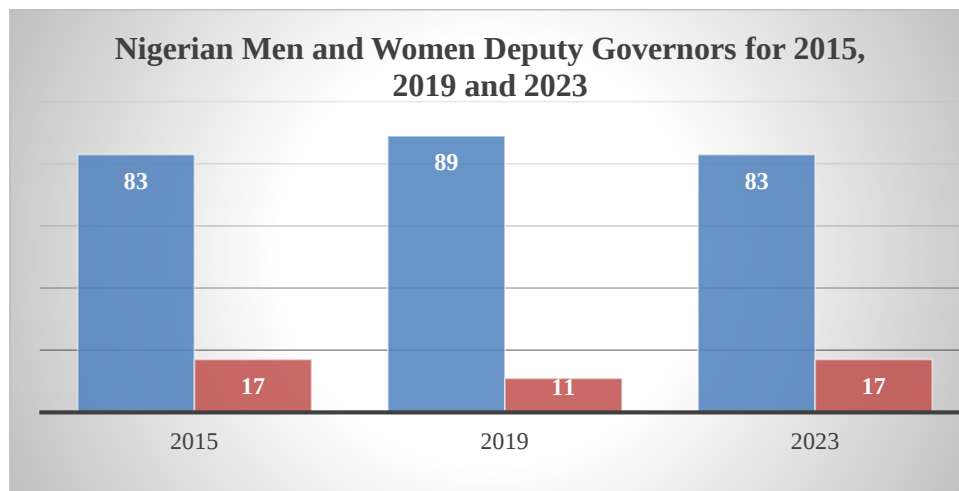


Figure 3. Nigerian Deputy Governors for 2015, 2019 and 2023

Source: Leadership (2022); Adeyemi (2023)

Figure 3 above shows the representation of women for the position of Deputy Governors in the 36 States in the country. In 2015, there were 30(83%) men Deputy Governors and 6(17%) women Deputy Governors. Women's representation was further reduced in 2019 with 32(89%) men Deputy Governors and 4(11%) women Deputy Governors. In 2023, there are 30(83%) and 6(17%) women Deputy Governors. The implication of the above reveals the superiority complex and discrimination against women in most political parties across the country.

An assessment of the States House of Assemblies for 2023 shows that out of 990 seats, women had just 48 seats. (Amata, 2023). Out of the 36 States of Nigeria, 15 States have no women in the State House of Assemblies. These are Abia, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Imo, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Osun, Rivers, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara. Ekiti has the highest number which is 6 out of 26 seats (Amata, 2023). Kwara has 5 seats, Akwa Ibom has 4 seats, Lagos and Ondo have 3 seats each while Baysa, Benue, Delta, Ebonyi, Enugu, Kaduna, Kogi, Ogun, Oyo, Plateau, and Taraba have 2 seats each while Adamawa, Anambra, Cross River, Edo and Nasarawa have 1 seat each (Amata, 2023). The low representation of women in law-making bodies would hinder all-inclusive policy in the States.

Demographic Variables

A total response of 151 was obtained from various States in Nigeria through an online questionnaire administered between 4th and 13th July, 2023. Respondents were from some of the Nigerian States. These State include Delta 5(3.97%), Edo 4(3.17%), Ekiti 56(44.44%), Gombe 1(0.79%), Kano 3(2.38%), Kwara 1(0.79%), Lagos 20(15.87%), Nasarawa 1(0.79%), Ogun 7(5.56%), Ondo 9(7.14%), Osun 5(3.97%), Oyo 6(4.76%), Taraba 1(0.79%), and FCT (Abuja) 7(5.56%). Both Northern and Southern Nigeria were covered but there were few responses from the North. This limitation was due to the inability to get assistants to widely persuade people to respond to the questionnaire in some of the States. Twenty-five (25) did not indicate their states of residence.

Table 1. Age of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	57	38.3
26-50	75	50.3
51-60	14	9.4
60 and above	3	2
Total	149	100
Missing	2	

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Respondents between age 18-25 were 57(38.3%), while age 26-50 were 75(50.3%), age 51-60 were 14(9.4%), and 60 and above 3(2%). Most of the respondents are women between the age of 25 – 50, who are likely to be more involved in politics. They would have realistic views of the position of women in governance.

Table 2. Marital Status of Respondents

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	52	34.7
Single	96	64
Widow/Widower	2	1.3
Total	150	100
Missing	1	

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

The above table depicts the marital status of respondents. Marital status of respondents includes married 52(34.7%), single 96(64%), widow/widower 2(1.3%), divorced 0(0%), and separated 0(0%). One respondent did not indicate marital status. Various categories of marital status were represented. This would add experience from people of various statuses.

Table 3. Highest Educational Qualification of Respondents

Highest Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Primary School certificate	0	0
Secondary School Certificate	17	11.5
Diploma/OND/NCE/A'L	12	8.1
HND	15	10.1
First Degree	75	50.7
PGD	5	3.4
Master's Degree	15	10.1
Doctorate Degree	9	6.1
Total	148	100
Missing	3	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Educational qualification of respondents includes primary school certificate 0(0%), secondary school certificate 17(11.5%), Diploma/OND/NCE/A'L 12(8.1%), HND 15(10.1%), First Degree 75(50.7%), PGD 5(3.4%), Master's Degree 15(10.1%), and Doctorate Degree 9(6.1%). Three (3) did not indicate their educational qualification. Three (3) respondents did not indicate their academic qualifications.

Table 4. Religion of Respondents

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Christianity	143	95.3
Islam	6	4
Others	1	0.7
Total	150	100
Missing	1	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Respondents are people of different religions. Most of the respondents are Christian, 143(95.3%) Islam 6(4%) while others are 1(0.7%). A respondent did not indicate his/her religion. Most respondents were Christians. This may be a result of low coverage in the Muslim-dominated States.

Table 5. Job Description of Respondents

Job Description	Frequency	Percentage
Student/Undergraduate	56	37.6
Civil Servant	17	10.4
Public Servant	16	10.7
Self-employed	36	24.2
Private Company employee	24	16.1
Total	149	100
Missing	2	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The respondents include students/undergraduates 56(37.6%), civil servants, 17(11.4%), public servants 16(10.7%), self-employed 36(24.2%), private company employees 24(16.1%), and 2 was (%). Two (2) respondents did not indicate their jobs. Most of the respondents were engaged in one job or the other.

Gender

149 responses

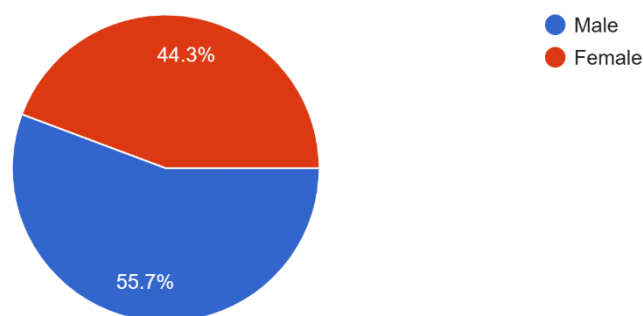
**Figure 4. Gender Description of Respondents**

Figure 4 above shows that the respondents include both males 83(55.7%) and females 66(44.3%). More males participated than females. This would reduce the level of bias that may be associated with only female respondents.

Objective 1. To examine the need for women representatives in governance.**Table 6. Need for Women's Representation in Governance**

The Need	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Missing (%)	Total affirmative (SA and A)	Total (%)
Qualities/talents needed	84(54%)	63(42%)	4(2.7%)	1(0.7%)	1	147(96%)	150
They would improve welfare	77 (51.7%)	66(44.3%)	5(3.4%)	1(0.7%)	2	143(96%)	149
Interest representation	84(56%)	39(32.7%)	14(9.3%)	3(2%)	1	123(65.3%)	150
Potentials (examples of past women leaders)	44 (29.5%)	81(54.4%)	20(13.4%)	4(2.7%)	2	125(83.9%)	149
Discipline/determination	63 (42.3%)	73(49%)	11(7.4%)	2(1.3%)	2	136(81.3%)	149
Expertise for politics	57(38%)	81(54%)	10(6.7%)	2(1.3%)	1	138(92%)	150

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The table above shows responses to the need for women's representation in governance. The majority of the respondents 84(54%) strongly agreed and 63(42%) agreed while 1(0.7%) strongly disagreed and 4(2.7%) disagreed that women have the qualities and talents needed for governance. On women's ability to improve welfare of the society than men, most of the respondents 77(51.7%) strongly agreed and 66(44.3%) agreed while 1(0.7%) strongly disagreed and 5(3.4%) disagreed. Similarly, there is consensus by the majority of the respondents, 84(56%) strongly agreed and 39(32.7%) agreed that there are specific interests that only women can represent well while 3(2%) strongly disagreed and 14 (9.3%) disagreed. Considering the examples of past women leaders who performed well, most of the respondents 44(29.5%) strongly agreed and 81(54.4%) agreed that women have the potential needed for good governance while 4(2.7%) strongly disagreed and 20(13.4%) disagreed. Also, most of the respondents, 63(42.3%) strongly agreed and 73(49%) agreed that women have the discipline and determination needed for governance while 2(1.3%) strongly agreed and 11(7.4%) disagreed. On the expertise for politics, almost all the respondents were affirmative, 57(38%) strongly agreed and 81(54%) agreed while 2(1.3%) strongly disagreed and 10(6.7%) disagreed.

In addition to the above, a respondent opined that

If women are given the opportunity, there is a high probability for tremendous growth and development, because women are good planners and decorators of homes and families. Like the organic theory of State, state, nation, and country have their origin in the family (in that case families birth the state). So, if women can put their houses and families in order, they should be able to put the country in order (Field Survey, 2023).

Also, a woman representative in Ekiti State House of Assembly, who is representing her constituency for the second term since 1999 revealed that

women perform better when accorded leadership positions and the level of efficiency is higher as they care more about the people and the society, and always want to prove that they are not just occupying the positions for fun (Field Survey, 2023).

She further confirmed the potential of women to perform well in governance, according to her,

It's shown that women perform better in politics as we saw the transformation of Rwanda where 60% were given positions which have transformed into a better and prosperous Rwanda and a top destination for investment and tourism in Africa" (Field Survey, 2023).

On the need for women's representation in governance, a women representative from PDP at the ward level in Delta State who has served for 7 years noted that women are needed because they easily reach the grassroots, and know the needs of women and how to help them. She opined that women can touch the lives of women more than men because they interact more with them (Field Survey, 2023).

Findings from this study reveal that women should be well represented in governance because the interests and needs of women cannot be represented well (if at all) by men who occupy decision-making offices. Also, women are naturally endowed with the qualities, talents, and expertise needed for governance. Women are welfare-oriented and have a sense of commitment and discipline for good governance.

In line with the above findings, Erunke and Shaibu, (2013) and Nebo, (2020) revealed the influence of women in socio-economic and political activities both in the traditional and contemporary times as pointers to the place of women in governance. Examples of such are iyalaje, iyaloja, iyalode, Mrs. Magreat Ekpo who led the Aba women riot in 1929, Queen Amina of Zaria, Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Madam Tinubu of Lagos, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, among others.

Oluwadamilola (2016) opined that women have the potential needed to enhance the development and growth of the country. He maintained that the role of women at home as home builders has extended influence on services rendered in all facets, governance inclusive.

Several other reasons have been identified by scholars for women's participation in governance. To Orji, Orji, and Agbayim (2018), women should be represented in governance for fair justice. They supported the above claim because women as half of the population should be given reasonable representation in the structure of policymaking. They further argued that certain interests could only be represented by women because of their experience. Such interest cannot be well represented by men. The inadequate representation due to needed experience and proper diagnosis will make associated women's problems to persist. They also claim that women should be represented in governance as part of their fundamental rights. The right to vote and be voted for as enshrined in the constitution does not discriminate against women. They further noted that women should be represented on the grounds of adding value to governance. They justified the claim because women can work in partisan environments, have concerns for welfare and respond to societal needs, and are committed to peacebuilding.

Objective 2. To investigate the factors for low representation of women in governance.

Table 7. Factors associated with the low representation

Factors	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Missing (%)	Total Affirmative (SA and A)	Total (%)
Lack of fund	50(33.1%)	39(25.8%)	54(35.8%)	8(5.3%)	-	89(58.9%)	151
Godfatherism	60(40%)	56(37.3%)	34(22.7%)	-	1	116(77.3%)	150
Cultural constraints	67(44.4%)	68(45%)	15(9.9%)	1(0.7%)	-	135(54.9%)	151
Family constraints	61(40.4%)	68(45%)	21(13.9%)	1(0.7%)	-	126(85.4%)	151
Indigeneity/nativity	49(32.5%)	64(42.4%)	36(23.8%)	2(1.3%)	-	113(74.9%)	151
Discrimination	69(50%)	58(42%)	9(6.5%)	2(1.4%)	13	127(92%)	138
Hate speech/threat	47(31.3%)	64(42.7%)	28(18.7%)	11(7.3%)	1	111(74%)	150
Party men not willing to step down	91(60.3%)	46(30.5%)	14(9.3%)	-	-	137(90.8%)	151

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The above table reflects the responses to factors for low representation of women in governance. More than half of the respondents opined that lack of funds is a factor in the low representation of women in governance, 50(33.1%) strongly agreed and 39(25.8%) agreed while 8(5.3%) strongly disagreed and 54(35.8%) disagreed. On godfatherism, the majority of the respondents 60(40%) strongly agreed and 56(37.3%) agreed that it affects women's representation negatively while 0(0%) strongly disagreed and 34(22.7%) disagreed. Also, cultural constraints as another major reason for the low representation of women in governance was supported by the majority of the respondents, 67(44.4%) strongly agreed and 68(45%) agreed while 1(0.7%) strongly disagreed and 15(9.9%) disagreed. Similarly, most of the respondents 61(40.4%) strongly agreed and 68(45%) agreed that family constraints as another factor for low representation of women in governance while 1(0.7%) strongly disagreed and 21(13.9%) disagreed. Besides, the issue of indigeneity or nativity was widely supported by respondents as a factor in the low representation of women in governance, 49(32.5%) strongly agreed and 64(42.4%) agreed to this while 2(1.3%) strongly disagreed and 36(23.8%) disagreed. Furthermore, discrimination against women was confirmed by almost all respondents as a reason for low representation of women in governance, 69(50%) strongly agreed and 58(42%) agreed while 2(1.4%) strongly disagreed and 9(6.5%) disagreed. In addition, hate speech and threats were widely supported by respondents as another cause of the low representation of women in governance. Majority of the respondents 47(31.3%) strongly agreed and 64(42.7%) agreed to the fact while 11(7.3%) strongly disagreed and 28(18.7%) disagreed. Also, almost all respondents opined that the unwillingness of party men to step down for women is a major factor in the low representation of women in governance. Most respondents, 91(60.3%) strongly agreed and 46(30.5%) agreed while 14(9.3%) disagreed.

In addition, a Local Government Vice Chairman in Ekiti State corroborated the family constraint as a factor of low representation of women in governance. She revealed her efforts to contest for political position in 1999 and the lack of support from her husband who believe that women who venture into politics are harlots. She was able to convince him before she participated in the 2023 election. She maintained that it is the determination of women that matters and some women are not politicians but are harlots (Field Work, 2023).

Also, a one-time Zonal Women Coordinator for Southwest revealed how women are discriminated against even from the primary election. She narrated how her supporters backed out (including women) to support her male counterpart at the late hour of the election (Field Survey, 2023). She further narrated how a man she approached to help her garner support for the sought position told her to “prepare well for me when next you are coming back to see me” (Field Survey, 2023). The man, according to her, said he could not help her free of charge. He expected the woman to give her body in exchange for the help so sought (Field Survey, 2023).

Another respondent revealed that women do oppose women. She noted that has been a common practice where women were against fellow women who showed interest in political positions by speaking evil of such aspirants to discredit them (Field Survey, 2023).

Findings from this study reveal the factors for low representation of women in governance including lack of funds, godfatherism, cultural and family constraints, indigeneity/nativity issues, discrimination, hate speech/threat, and the unwillingness of party men to step down for women.

In line with the above findings, many scholars have identified challenges to women's representation in governance. Erunke and Shuaibu, (2013) and Chukwurah, Nduba, and Izunwane, (2020) revealed lack of funds as one of the reasons for low women representation in governance. Chukwurah, Nduba, and Izunwane (2020) noted the importance of money in campaigns and in determining the status of women. Most women who would venture into politics are incapacitated due to a lack of landed properties occasioned by the culture of patriarchy, dependent on their husbands (who may not have an interest in the women's

aspiration for politics), and lack of sponsorship. Lack of access to well-paid jobs, as a result of lack of academic requisites, also affects women's financial status.

Nebo (2020) opined that the inability of women to have a network of godfatherism constitutes a major obstacle to women's representation in governance. Godfatherism has become part of Nigerian political culture over some years now. The practice of godfatherism in which an influential politician presents a candidate for a position to be supported by the party is a hindrance for any aspiring women who lack such support.

Religion is still a major hindrance to women's representation in governance in Nigeria. It is a popular religious belief that women are to be submissive while men take the lead. Some cultures position men as sole decision-makers while women are subordinates. Chukwurah, Nduba, and Izunwane (2020) cited Colossians 3:13, 1 Peter 3:1, Ephesians 5:22-23 and Titus 2:4-5 as part of the Bible that put men over women while the Islamic religion would see women trying to assert leadership as tending to western life and a disgrace to Islam. In the same vein, Orji, Orji, and Agbanyim (2018) argued that cultural constraint has edged women out of political representation because of the patriarchal patterns and the assigned roles to women to keep the homes. PLAC (2019) submitted that the burden of domestic work and lack of party support are factors in the low representation of women in governance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examines women's representation in governance in Nigeria with a specific focus on 2015 to 2023. It reveals the need for women's representation at all levels of governance which includes justice claim on the grounds of women population, equality of rights as spelled out in the constitution, special qualities and talents naturally bestowed on women, the potential for governance as manifested by women leaders in the traditional and contemporary political systems. Besides, the welfare quality of women is needed for development and overall growth in the country. The enterprise manifested by women during campaign and voting if allowed would be transferred to effective leadership to position the country for greatness and better international relations. The study identified the factors for low representation of women in governance in Nigeria to include lack of funds, godfatherism, cultural and family constraints, discrimination, hate speech, and threats as well as the unwillingness of party men to step in to give women a place. There is a need for urgent policy adjustment to stem the tides of low representation of women in governance in Nigeria, hence the following recommendations:

- i. The government should include a realistic quota in the electoral act to accommodate women at every level of governance. For instance, where the Presidential/governorship candidate is a man, the deputy should be a woman, and vice versa. The three representatives to the House of Representatives can be made a ratio of two men to a woman as a starting point. The same should apply to the senatorial and State Houses of Assembly positions.
- ii. Political parties should be enlightened to give more support to women. It can be mandated for parties to interchange certain political positions at all levels with men and women. For instance, if a party feeds the position of Local Government chairman with a man, the same position should be given to women during the next election.
- iii. The socio-cultural constraints to women's representation should be addressed through political education, and sensitization of the society on the rights of women. It is not only in the kitchen that women can perform. If that is true, why do we have most nurses as women caring for people with diverse ailments, most teachers and women producing lawyers, doctors, engineers, and accountants, among others. Women have been adding value to lives and would not perform less if allowed to participate in governance.
- iv. Women should also be enlightened to shun timidity and come out with confidence and determination to contest for political positions so long monopolized by men. Besides,

- Mentorship programmes can help develop the skill and confidence needed by women to venture into politics. Women can be paired with experienced women politicians who can provide guidance and support.
- v. Women should do their homework to gain support from their husbands and their society. They should acquire the necessary education to avoid the issues of certificates being used against them.
 - vi. Women should be encouraged to support women. Since women are very active in political campaigns and voting, their support for fellow women would increase the support for female candidates.
 - vii. Women should do their homework properly to convince their husbands that women who venture into politics are not harlots but respectable people. Women in politics should have an avenue for counseling other women who are already in politics to comport themselves with dignity so that they would earn the respect of onlookers.
 - viii. Besides, special funds should be made available for women by governments at all levels. This would to an extent reduce the challenge of financial incapability on the part of women contestants. Individual politicians (especially women) and philanthropists should also be encouraged to assist interested women in their desire for political positions.
 - ix. The government should put practicable policies in place to prevent violent activities and money politics before and during elections. This can be done by creating an enabling environment for peaceful campaigns, and free and fair elections. The use of thugs should be discouraged with penalties for the thugs and their sponsors. Sincerity on the part of the government, especially the incumbent, is necessary to achieve violent free elections.
 - x. The government should embark on realistic political reform to put an end to unholy practices such as godfatherism, thuggery, and rigging of elections. There should be transparency at all stages of elections, both in primary and general elections. The electoral body should discharge its duties conscientiously to enable the will of the people to prevail.

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