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WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIAN POLITICS: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS TO NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

The study examined the extent that Nigerian women contributed to political participation in the country and also the factors that hinder them from participating fully. The issue of women in politics has dominated the political debate since Nigeria gained its independence. Nigerian women have not received the kind of representation that is required to enable them to influence the political space like their male counterparts as this makes it difficult for women to be part of the decision-making process. The study adopted Liberal feminism theory to explain gradual improvements through advocating for equal rights for all, and legislation and policies that promote equality. The study adopted content analysis and the study relied on secondary sources of data. The study revealed that several impediments have been identified that limit the participation of women in politics. These barriers are cultural, economic, and legal amongst others that have affected the participation of women in politics. The study concluded that even though women may function at the greatest levels in both the public and private realms, a vicious loop of barriers frequently hinders their ability to lead. The success of these individuals as leaders has been significantly hampered by both internal and external obstacles, including societal and cultural prejudices, patriarchy, the challenge of juggling parental and professional commitments, and a lack of networking. The study recommended that to gain the necessary leadership qualities, women should choose to pursue positions of leadership in both the public and private sectors and should educate themselves to the highest levels. To reduce illiteracy and prepare female students for future leadership duties, parents, especially those in rural areas, should be urged to enroll their female children in school. The study also recommended that the current women empowerment policy be reviewed to reflect the actual situation and that government should also establish a network of women leaders so that women can share their leadership successes and challenges to inspire other women who aspire to be leaders.

Keywords: equality, liberal feminism theory, political participation, women

Introduction

Nigeria returned to full-fledged democracy in 1999 after recording 16 years of military dictatorship in the country. The periodic election has become part and

parcel of the features of the Nigerian democratic dispensation after every four years. There is no doubt that the constitution does not place any restriction on any candidate based on gender as Nigeria practices universal adult suffrage where adults from eighteen years of age can vote and be voted for irrespective of gender. The issue of women in politics has dominated the political debate since Nigeria gained its independence in 1960. Samuel and Segun (2012) observed that in the first republic, Nigeria only have four female lawmakers in the entire country and this negligible number failed to give Nigerian women the kind of representation that is required to enable them to influence the political space like their male counterpart as this makes it difficult for women to be part of the decision-making process. Luka (2012) has noted that the second republic and third republic recorded little progress concerning women's participation in politics and decision-making. He further observed that before 1999, the proportion of seats occupied by women never exceeded 3.1% and 5% for the national parliament and federal Executive council respectively (Luka, 2012).

Women find it challenging to participate in democratic politics due to the widespread issue of gender inequality. In world politics, very few women have ever attained the highest echelons of political office. Gender inequality has been a fundamental problem that women have encountered in the political sphere around the world. There are few opportunities for women to participate in politics in Nigeria, which has a patriarchal society (Ojo, 2013). The political parochialism of Nigerian society discouraged women from participating in politics, and the adversarial imbalance has continued to rage their political flourish. The patriarchal system of traditional and sociopolitical systems denigrates the role of women in politics and called for male dominance in Nigerian democratic politics. Women are completely excluded from democratic politics in Nigeria because of the nature, customs, traditions, and cultural backgrounds of the political nomenclature, which completely limits their ability to survive in politics. In Nigerian political situations, women are consistently viewed as second-class citizens in all of their numerous spheres (Ojo, 2013).

Nigerian women have roughly the lowest participation in the national legislature, with 5.9%, when compared to the bulk of other African countries, including Uganda (34.6%), South Africa (43.2%), Ethiopia (27.7%), Cameroon (20%), Niger (12.3%), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (8.0%). (18 May 2012, Daily Times). Nigerian women in particular have not attained that level of political participation. Women's participation in governance in Nigeria remains incredibly low, ranking last in the world at barely 7% (Onyegbula, 2013). Women's participation in politics in Nigeria over time has not precisely been positive. The political situation in the nation is extremely active. Every day, more people declare their desire to run for office in the general election. Similarly to this, Ehanire-Danjuma (2005) said that the low representation of women in political and decision-making structures is a result of the lack of recognition of the fact that the gender component of democracy makes the democratic process inclusive (Ojo, 2013). Nigeria's political and decision-making representation of women is still well below the global norm of 35% affirmative action (Ngara, 2013). This for the most part accounted for the marginalization of women in public affairs and the exclusion of their interests in governance.

The absence of women from party politics has a huge negative impact on Nigeria's political and electoral process. Their marginalization has hindered women's contributions, involvement, and influence in party politics and the Nigerian political system. Nigerian women first experienced marginalization in party politics and the political process during the colonial era. Erunke and Abdul (2013) correctly stated that "this gender bias in Nigeria's political system is often tied to the beginning of colonialism in Nigeria." Thus, their encounters with Nigeria strengthened the colonialism-based western cultural paradigm that is based on the superiority of men (Erunke & Abdul, 2013). Due to the exclusion of women from party politics in Nigeria, gender issues have also recently come to the attention of professionals in the field. This research paper adopted liberal feminist theory to analyze women in party politics and its impact on the political process to address the marginalization of women by their male counterparts concerning the appointment, selection, and election into various political posts in Nigeria.

Problem statement

The historically low representation of women in politics is frequently due to social marginalization rather than a lack of desire or motivation. In Nigeria, women make up to 50% of the population and approximately 51% of the electorate, yet they are not afforded the same rights as men, who control the political landscape and occupy the great majority of the nation's decision-making positions (Ogbogu, 2012).

The National Assembly has been overwhelmingly dominated by men since 1999 when democracy was reinstated in Nigeria. In our political and socioeconomic lives, there is a patriarchal framework that, Ojo (2013) affirmed that it limits the involvement of women in politics in favor of their male counterparts, creating an imbalance in political participation and representation. Ojo (2013) went on to say that despite the necessity for gender balance in legislatures around the world, Nigeria still has a very low rate of female representation in the country's parliament, which is exceedingly worrying. Nigeria has accepted several international agreements that prohibit gender discrimination and advance equal access for men and women in governmental and other decision-making institutions. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which affirms that everyone has the right to vote and that men and women should enjoy equal rights, is one of them; the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which Nigeria's government ratified without reservation in 1985, as well as its 2000 Optional Protocol, which Nigeria ratified in 2004; and the 1995 UN Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which urged member states to take action to enact laws prohibiting discrimination against women. The National Assembly still has a sizable gender disparity, nevertheless. The majority of these documents have not been domesticated, despite the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended in section 12) providing that an international treaty must be done so for it to apply.

To make matters worse, a measure introduced by Senator Biodun Olujimi in 2016 that aimed to domesticate and include these instruments was voted down on second reading by both Chambers of the National Assembly (Eniola, 2018 cited in

Okechukwu, 2022). In addition, the Nigerian Constitution of 1999 stipulates that to serve in the National Assembly, a person must be chosen by a political party in that party's primary election. Political parties are significant institutions in representative democracies, as stated by Pierre, Warren, and Brand (2014) since they support candidates in elections. Researchers frequently ignore the role of party politics in preserving gender disparity in Nigeria's politics because they frequently concentrate on patriarchal, cultural, and religious factors as well as economic and educational factors that contribute to low women representation in representative democracy in Nigeria. The paper tries to fill the knowledge gap by addressing the difficulties highlighted above and providing a response to the subsequent research questions:

1. To what extent have Nigerian women contributed to political participation in the country?
2. What are the challenges restricting women's participation in politics in Nigeria?

Literature Review

Overview of women's political participation in 1999 – 2019 general elections

An overview of women's political participation in general elections from 1999 to 2019. Men and women are both present in society, thus it follows that both should participate equally in politics. This assumption is supported by the democratic ideal emphasizing the equal representation of all interest groups in the political sphere. The continual responsiveness of the government to the desires of its citizens, who are viewed as political equals, is cited by Dahl (1971) in Okeke (2015) as a key trait of a democracy. In Nigeria, a democracy, the low representation of women in politics is viewed as a breach of this concept. According to Oluyemi (2016), the restoration of democracy on May 29, 1999, inspired hope for a new beginning in the fight for greater gender equity in Nigerian politics. Even though the democratic transition has provided opportunities that enable equitable participation, statistics, and statistical data from 1999 to the present plainly show that women's involvement in Nigerian politics is negligible. Since Nigeria transitioned to democracy in 1999, it has gone through six different administrations.

Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Omolara (2015) notes that Nigerian women have tried to run for elective positions at various levels to access positions of political decision-making, but their efforts have not been very successful based on the outcomes of elections held since 1999. The general election participation of women in 2015 is examined by Omolara (2015). Given that there are fewer women than men in positions of leadership and decision-making, women continue to be disproportionately marginalized (Omolara, 2015). For instance, in the political history of Nigeria, neither a female president nor vice president has ever been elected. President Obasanjo served in power from 1999 to 2007, which might be compared to the length of time between the restoration of democracy and the protracted era of military rule. President Umaru Musa Yar'adua succeeded him as a leader in 2007, and President Goodluck Jonathan took over in 2010 after Yar'adua's passing. Jonathan remained in office until 2015. After the 2019 elections, President Muhammadu Buhari was still in office. He first came to power in 2015.

The vice presidency in Nigeria used the same aesthetic as the president. Since democracy was restored in 1999, four men have occupied the job. In the history of Nigeria, a woman has never been elected governor. The first and only female

governor in the country was Mrs. Virginia Etiaba, who took office as governor of Anambra State in 2006 after Peter Obi was removed from office. She only held the position for three months. The National Assembly has also been dominated by men. Only three women were among the 109 senators in the Senate in 1999. That number increased to four by 2007, nine by 2011, seven by 2015, and seven by 2019 as well (Ohaja et al., 2022). In the House of Representatives in 1999, there were 12 women out of the 360 members. Twenty-three were added in 2003, then twenty-six in 2007, twenty-six in 2011, and eleven in 2019 (Ohaja et al., 2022). From the federal to the municipal levels of government, there is an unequal representation of women in elective positions. The table below provides information on the number of women who have been elected to public office from 1999-2019.

Table 1. Number of women in elected positions from 1999-2019

Office	Seats available	1999 Women	2003 women	2007 Women	2011 women	2015 women	2019 Women
President	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vice president	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Senate	109	3	4	9	7	7	7
House of Rep.	360	12	23	27	26	20	11
Governor	36	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dep. Governor	36	1	2	6	3	6	4
State HA	990	12	38	54	62	-	40

Source: Adopted from Ohaja et al., 2022

According to Afolabi and Arogundade (2003), there are four ways to look at the challenges of women's political representation and engagement in politics and government. Access, participation, representation, and change. The eventual consequence will be a social and political transformation in the polity as a result of access to political institutions, participation (which includes control of power within such institutions), and quantitative and qualitative representation. These four requirements must be met to increase the political empowerment of women. Three things support the idea that women in politics are important: First of all, politics is a crucial setting for decision-making. The distribution of limited resources, such as tax money, is left to the discretion of those who occupy official positions in the government. Politicians make choices that may benefit some individuals at the expense of others. Politicians frequently take positions that encourage some behaviors while discouraging others, affecting the personal choices that people make. Second, political clout is a valuable asset. The family is one example of a social institution that is impacted by politics. Third, authority is necessary to engage in politics (Paxton, 2010).

Women in positions of authority and leadership can improve the lives of other women by influencing decisions that influence them. Igwe (2002) defined political participation as the degree and kind of public participation in governmental institutions and institutions that are linked to them, such as the economy and culture (cited in Uwa, 2018). It includes voting in elections, taking part in political discussions and campaigns, going to party caucuses or strategy sessions, running for office, and holding elective office. Okolie (2004) also incorporates the rights to social justice, associational freedom, free speech, and the free flow of information into his definition (cited in Uwa, 2018). He contends that exercising one's rights

also includes fighting for better social and medical services, better working conditions, more income, and other things. As a core motivation for engaging in politics, all groups - including those of women seek to influence the distribution of power following their expressed objectives. In recent years, women have become increasingly interested in changing the balance of power, resource allocation, and mentality in their favor. However, a thorough investigation has shown the degree of voting and latent support where women are most visible in Nigerian politics. According to Adeniyi (2003), the main obstacles to and inhibitors of women's active participation in Nigerian politics include violence and other types of electoral disputes committed and promoted by men and male youths. Arguments on the exact role that women should play in society are becoming more prevalent.

There is disagreement about whether women should primarily focus on domestic duties or whether they should be allowed to participate in other socioeconomic and political activities like men. Even though it is thought that a mother's inherent devotion to her child may limit and restrict her to sedentary hobbies, she should nonetheless contribute her fair bit to the development of her family and society as a whole. Due to the ongoing marginalization of Nigerian women, they are unable to perform these jobs. It's interesting to note that even while women are valued as voters in a democratic system, they nevertheless lack the acceptance to participate in power structures and reach positions of decision-making authority since they are seen as being underqualified.

According to Guzman (2004), this explains why women's access to leadership roles does not always lead to better coordination of women's interests overall. It also clarifies how women can have their actual needs overlooked in favor of those that are based on their racial heritage, socioeconomic class, or cultural upbringing (cited in Uwa, 2018). Female legislators can promote the objectives of "feminizing the political agenda," or the expression of women's concerns and opinions in public debate, as well as the desire for public policies to take into account how they affect women (Dovi, 2006). In a male-dominated legislature, the majority of gender issues are either ignored or addressed primarily from a male perspective. The majority of the time, female legislators had to persuade their male colleagues that a certain gender measure should be passed. With the use of historical precedents, we may now advance the cultural beliefs of some pre-colonial nations to better comprehend the crucial and useful roles that women in those communities during that time played. This will assist us in establishing or disproving a connection between limited female political engagement and people's traditional cultural orientation.

The question of finance is one of the primary elements, according to Asase (2003), that limits and inhibits women's engagement in politics today. She also stated that some who oppose women in politics believe it is improper for a woman to make special efforts to lobby others. Most likely does, for the fund. She might as well give up on her political aspirations right away. In response to the problem of women's empowerment, Stacey (1993), "The Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development," lamented the poor involvement and marginalization of women in the Nigerian political system, attributing it to the unfavorable political atmosphere in the nation. She also attributed the problem to the male chauvinism and violence that permeate Nigerian political environments, as well as a lack of funding, as some of the things preventing Nigerian women from running in elections and resulting in a low proportion of women holding public office.

35 percent affirmative action of women participation in government

Nigeria is a complex state, in contrast to other nations where things are often not done well. If caution is not immediately used, the 35% affirmative action could end up being a mirage. The reality is that no level of administration showed any sincerity in achieving the 35% affirmation of women's participation in active government. According to Oham (2011), the future administration's zoning plan would have a low percentage of women. In the last general elections that were held in 2011, reports show that among the 36 states of the federation, only seven (7) women were elected to the Senate, twelve (12) to the House of Representatives, and one (1) deputy governor. The women claimed that for the situation to normalize and gender parity to be achieved in the nation, they must be given 35% of the appointments in the new government. Additionally, according to statistics, 218 women ran for House of Representatives seats, and 88 women ran for Senate seats in the 2011 elections. In the elections, there were only five (5) women standing for governor across the nation, but several male candidates for the position had female running mates (Kolawole et al., 2012). Comparatively, these numbers also show a drop in women's success when Nigerian democracy was restored in 1999. The party primary was challenging for the approximately 631 women who were running for the over 1,900 slots in the 1999 elections. Only 181 people were chosen to take office. Compared to 2007 and 2003, 2011 saw a decline in the number and percentage of women elected to office. Only 93 women nationwide were elected to government in the 2007 elections, despite winning 660 party primaries (Kolawole et al., 2012).

Odebode (2011) argued that the incumbent government's pledge of 35% affirmative women participation may not be fully met, even though Jonathan had during electioneering pledged to have 35% women representation in his administration and at the Mentorship Summit for African Women, organized by the Centre for African Women Leaders Think-Thank in Abuja on May 3, reiterated his commitment to his campaign promise of 35%. In a similar vein, party statistics revealed that the only position reserved for women was women leader, out of over 40 positions, even though it was suggested that women should be given 20% representation in the formation of political parties, not in an elective position, not in any concrete position. For example, we suggested that the PDP give 20% representation to women in executive positions, but it was rejected (Taiwo, 2010).

Liberal feminist theory

Giddens (2006) defines liberal feminism as a philosophy that holds that gender inequality is caused by women's lack of access to civil rights and specific social resources like education and employment. Liberal feminists frequently turn to amending the legislation to find solutions and guarantee that people's rights are protected (Giddens, 2006).

Liberal feminism, in the words of Samkange (2015), is "gradual improvements through advocating for equal rights for all, and legislation and policies that promote equality." This shows that women have an equal right to participate in politics, run for office without fear of backlash, and make politically relevant decisions for society. It is appropriate for men and women to have equal rights. Through education or culture, they shouldn't be held back from actively engaging in societal activities.

Traditional notions of women's inferiority to men still rule in Nigeria due to broad support for cultural practices that promote subordination. In terms of social, political, economic, and religious issues, men continue to dominate. Women's political endeavors, accomplishments, and societal achievements are hardly ever acknowledged. It is essential for women to actively participate in political decision-making so that they have the status, responsibilities, and rights that they are entitled to in light of these circumstances (Kasomo as cited in Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2015). In terms of political participation, income, labor force participation, and the proportion of seats in parliament, women in Nigeria continue to face less favorable conditions than men (Azuh, Egharevba, & Azuh, 2014 cited in Tama & Maiwuya, 2022). For women to attain their right to equality in Nigeria, liberal feminism must receive more emphasis.

Application of the theory

It is undeniable that Nigeria is a patriarchal society where men dominate women in all spheres because of the false belief that society holds that women are naturally less intelligent and physically capable than men. As a result, society tends to discriminate against women. The assumption is also made that female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal restrictions that prevent women from entering and succeeding in the so-called public world. Since 1999, it has been against the law for political parties in the nation to nominate women on an equal basis for party offices and elected positions like those up for election to the National Assembly. Nevertheless, they benefitted from every measure taken to boost the number of men in parliament. Two examples are the timing of political events, which usually occur after work hours when women are caring for domestic responsibilities at home, and the nation's political violence, which disproportionately affects women because of their sensitivity. Women in Nigeria face discrimination in appointive or elective positions where policies affecting them are formulated, based on the presumption that women's needs and interests are inadequately reflected in the fundamental conditions under which they live and that those conditions lack legitimacy because women are inadequately represented in the processes of democratic self-determination. Due to the low representation of women in the National Assembly, legislation that would assist Nigerian women and the most vulnerable citizens does not pass. This pattern supports the supposition that the National Assembly should have more women members.

Challenges against women's active participation in politics

Several impediments have been identified as limiting the participation of women in the social, economic, and political scenes. These barriers are cultural, economic, and legal amongst others. This intervention would focus on some distinctly Nigerian variants of these barriers.

Religious and socio-cultural factors

The social, political, and economic constraints that these groups must contend with are actively supported by religion, which also works to promote gender stereotypes that are discriminatory against women. For instance, in some northern parts of Nigeria, women are in Purdahs out of reverence for Islam. This suggests that they are segregated in their rooms and that only their spouses have full access

to them. The spouse is the only one who must satisfy their requirements. It is best to let rumors about how people are living since the majority of homes are below the poverty line. Religion ensures that a significant majority of women are excluded from economic and political activities, including voting and running for office (Luka, 2011). Islamic edicts are frequently cited as justification for practices like the state's practice of keeping women in "Purdah," giving girls away in early marriages, denying them an education, and limiting their ability to participate effectively in politics in general and when selecting candidates of their choice. The majority of Muslim-populated states in the north observe "purdah," which involves excluding women from the public eye. In purdah, women must always have a male companion with them when they are out in public and are not permitted to leave their homes without their husbands' permission. Further restricting the flexibility of attire for women under purdah is the requirement for Muslim women to cover their faces in public. There is a cultural presumption that women are abominable when they lead men and cannot lead but must be guided. Many women are unable to be found in high-hierarchy positions due to religious and cultural philosophies that work against gender equality and employment prospects for men and women (Abdu, 2002).

Violence and threat

Political violence is another element that lowers women's political participation in Nigeria. Due to the involvement of thugs before, during, and after elections (Kolawale et al., 2012) and the ensuing insecurity, which involves the loss of lives and property, politics is generally out of the question for women. Female candidate Dorothy Nyone described her own experience by saying, "A ward chairman was shot dead; all the women and most of the males fled the scene." My partner picked me up and drove me home. I was afraid since, to determine the winners by hand, only men who were well equipped for the bloodshed remained behind (Luka, 2011). Even though this tale typically represents electoral violence in Nigeria, many women now fear politics due to the recent spate of political murders, ongoing political intimidation, and other violent acts.

Cost of election

In Nigeria, both genders are equally affected, although women suffer more damage quickly. An important obstacle for women is the high expense of contributing to political parties and campaigns. The least expensive governor's campaign would probably cost 200 million nairas. How many men are capable of raising the same amount of money for women, and how many women are capable of raising such a sizeable amount of money? Given that she would have had little impact on party funding and formation, which political party would select a woman for that position? (Nda, 2003). In a system where lots of money is needed to purchase votes and compromise conscience, candidates without deep pockets and money bags as support cannot achieve their goals of running for public office. The majority of parties charge a hefty fee for nomination forms to run for elective positions. Their average wealth can be partially blamed for Nigerian women's reluctance to actively participate in politics. The high costs charged by political parties for candidates to run for office may be properly attributed to the cheerleader and clapper positions that women have chosen in these collectives. Women's hopes

to participate are also dashed by their limited access to credit and money on the economic front (Luka, 2011). Few women have the financial means to sustain themselves in politics, which forces them to rely on their husbands or other immediate family members, which is not always simple. The average woman finds it expensive to buy nomination forms, rent campaign offices, engage staff, print posters, buy vehicles, outfit those vehicles with potent sound systems, buy fuel, etc. Nigeria has a capital-intensive political system, which makes it difficult for average women to participate in politics.

Discriminatory customs and laws

The customs of many modern countries are discriminatory because they devalue women and treat them as men's property. Women feel generally inferior to men and are at a disadvantage in the socio-political environment, even in urban regions, as a result of gender stereotyping cultural norms, and behaviors. Because of these socially constructed standards and stereotype roles, women overemphasize their "femininity" because they accept their status as "weaker sexes," overemphasize the sensitive element of their sex and equate high performance with men. For instance, most traditions place more value on sending the boy to a school than they do on the girl, who is expected to care for the siblings and find a husband. This makes it more difficult for women to compete with men in politics because there are a few more illiterate women than there used to be. (Agbalajobi, 2010).

Women's conception of politics

There has been some broad consensus that the foundation of Nigerian politics is high political virility; these are individuals with the skills to compete in an unstable environment, the capacity to take it by force when force is necessary, and the ability to march violence with violence. Women are viewed as being too passive to participate in politics and governance, whereas men are viewed as being more competitive, strong, independent, and willing to battle in political undertakings. This consensus is also influenced by social conventions and ideas that, via socialization, defined various gender roles under biological distinctions. Due to their perception of traditional politics as a filthy game and their dread of violence, women are more alienated from it. In Nigeria, there seems to be a lack of critical understanding of the difference between a visible agenda for women and an agenda that has an impact on women (Nkoyo, 2002). Even though the importance of women's numbers has been underlined repeatedly, it has been difficult for women to rise to positions of power since, in contrast to their male counterparts, they are viewed as "supporters clubs, squads of cheerleaders and clappers." The majority of female politicians believe that to succeed, they must behave like males; they seek office under the impression that they are unique. Furthermore, women's modesty does not help them during the political confrontation (Agbalajobi, 2010).

Lack of interest by the women

The majority of women have little interest in participating in politics. Women's lack of interest in politics can sometimes be attributed to a variety of social factors, including their socialization, the idea that politics and leadership are not for them, their disinterest in political competition with men in any party, social stigma, socio-cultural issues, and religious beliefs, among others. According to

Abdu (2002), most women would appropriately prioritize their efforts if there were justice in the world by getting married, having children, and doing solely domestic duties rather than engaging in politics.

Prospects of women leadership in Nigeria

There was no gender parity on problems of leadership in the public and private sectors of the economy during the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras. There have always been problems with male domination in Nigerian leadership, and the lack of female involvement in public affairs hurts the expansion of organizations. The Beijing conference in 1995, also known as the fourth international conference on women, which emphasized equal participation of women in decision-making bodies, marked the beginning of the golden age of women. It also implied that difficulties facing society should be balanced between men and women. The main metrics for measuring effective leadership - participatory leadership, accountability, and transparency - call for gender parity in leadership opportunities (Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2015). To ensure that women have the chance to engage in leadership, Nigeria has ratified a variety of international, regional, and national legislation; yet, these laws are only put into practice on paper.

Despite the 30% and 35% affirmative action offered to women in the National Gender Policy (2006) and the National Women Policy (2000), respectively, Nigeria has not been able to show its commitment by electing women to leadership posts. The high level of poverty among women is a result of their lack of access to resources like microcredit programs, capital for large-scale investment, and land for agricultural pursuits. This can be lessened, though, by providing equitable access to resources, advancing technology, empowering women in their entrepreneurship, enlightening women about investment prospects, and assisting women in the development of small, medium, and large-scale businesses. Campaigns have been undertaken to register women and girls in elementary, post-primary, and tertiary institutions. The percentage of women and girls enrolled in school varies by geopolitical zone, according to the 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (64% in the North East, 69% in the North West, and 5% in the South-South and South East). According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2016), this is supported by the fact that 48.8% of girls enrolled in primary school and 45.7% in secondary school, and that the completion rates for these two levels of education are 48.3% and 47.9%, respectively. Additionally, 43.7% of girls attended tertiary institutions, with a 38.4% completion rate (Udom et al., 2022). Taking leadership positions in private and public organizations becomes challenging when women and girls are not given equal opportunities and access to education. Changing the perception of most Nigerian parents, especially those in rural areas, on the role of women in society will help in achieving this (Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although women may function at the greatest levels in both the public and private realms, a vicious loop of barriers frequently hinders their ability to lead. The success of these individuals as leaders has been significantly hampered by both internal and external obstacles, including societal and cultural prejudices, patriarchy, the challenge of juggling parental and professional commitments, and a

lack of networking. According to the study's conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

- i. It takes more than just a shift in mindsets to eliminate harmful sociocultural stereotypes, patriarchy, religiosity, and gender bias against women's participation in government. To gain the necessary leadership qualities, women should choose to pursue positions of leadership in both the public and private sectors and should educate themselves to the highest levels. To reduce illiteracy and prepare female students for future leadership duties, parents, especially those in rural areas, should be urged to enroll their female children in school.
- ii. It is not advised for a woman leader to strive to be more masculine to succeed, nor should she let her more "feminine" traits get in the way of getting things done. Therefore, female leaders should maintain concentration on their departments' and organizations' objectives. To overcome self-doubt, it's crucial to urge people to disregard the inner voice that may keep them from making difficult decisions, speaking up, or venturing outside of their comfort zone.
- iii. The numerous rules and pieces of legislation that are in place to empower women in various facets of leadership positions have fallen short in addressing sociocultural stereotypes about women in leadership, hence limiting their access to and success in such opportunities. The study, therefore, suggests that the current women empowerment policy be reviewed to reflect the actual situation and that government should also establish a network of women leaders so that women can share their leadership successes and challenges to inspire other women who aspire to be leaders.

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