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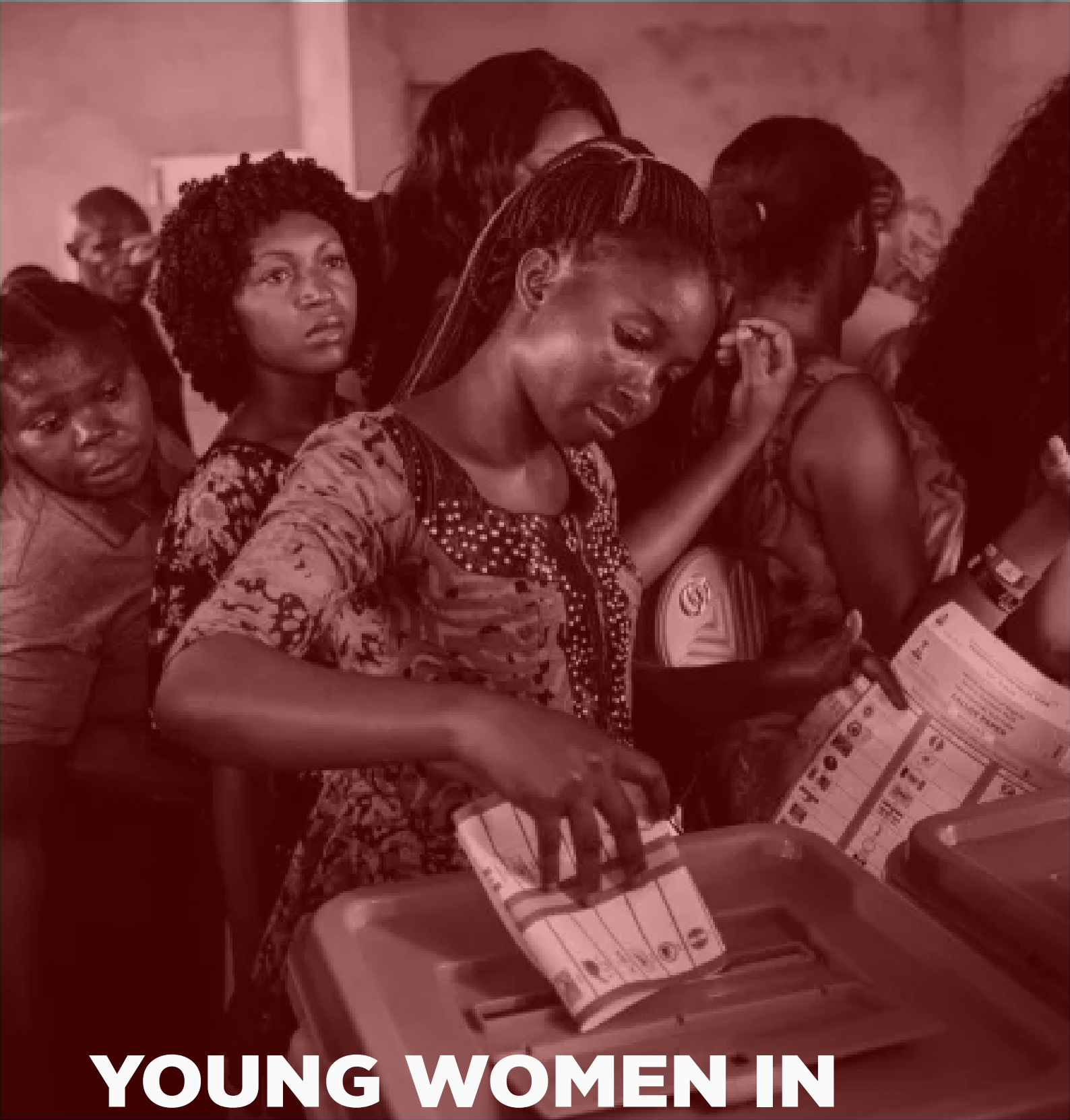
GETTING WOMEN ELECTED

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

NOVEMBER, 2020

SERIES 3






YOUNG WOMEN IN POLITICS IN NIGERIA

Issues and prospects: A case study of the 2019 general elections

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“If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.”
— *Shirley Chisholm*

Abstracts

Since Nigeria returned to democratic governance in 1999, it has completed seven election cycles. In all these elections, women have been largely marginalised in the political space at all levels. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union 2019 rankings, Nigeria has one of the lowest rates of women's legislative representation in Africa. This paper will examine the historical progress, interventions made, and challenges faced by young women in politics in Nigeria's 20 years of democracy. In doing so it aims to contribute to a broader review of women's political representation in Nigeria.

The paper contends that three factors limit young women's political participation in politics in Nigeria: a lack of financial resources - women candidates cannot afford the exorbitant prices for party tickets, campaign costs, and resource mobilisation; a shortage of political 'know-how' - women struggle to navigate the often

patriarchal and violent political context and terrain; and a challenging institutional framework - the existing electoral laws and political party dynamics do not support a level playing field for new entrants and marginalised groups.

The paper concludes that if Nigeria's democratic space is to be participatory and inclusive in line with global expectations, there must be an enabling environment - legal, social and economic - for women, especially young women, to fully exercise their agency. Political parties must practice internal party democracy to create spaces for these groups. Without these reforms, Nigeria will become, even more, a democracy that suppresses the agency and inclusion of women in governance processes; one characterised by the political and moral bankruptcy of godfathers, money politics, thuggery and violence.



Nigeria is Africa's most populous country with an estimate of over 200 million people; females represent 49.4% of its total population (Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, 2015). With over 84 million registered voters, Nigeria is also Africa's largest democracy. Since 1999 Nigeria has conducted seven general elections, however, women account for less than 10% of elected candidates in each. In the 2019 polls less than 4% of those elected were women. Out of the 6,300 candidates who vied for the total of 469 seats in the legislature - House of Representatives (360) and Senate (109) - just 12% were women. Only 17 of those 469 seats were won by women. The situation is similar in the 36 State Houses of Assembly and the 774 local government councils. In 2019, a record 1,825 women contested at the state level, but only 40 of them clinched seats with only two under the age of 35. This in a nation where over half the population is under 20. Moreover, very few women are appointed to leadership positions at the federal and state levels. President Muhammadu Buhari's ministerial cabinet of 43 includes only seven women with an average age of 59.

The trend is moving in the wrong direction. From a high of 8% of female National Assembly (NASS) members elected in 2007, that figure has now halved. This situation raises important questions about what barriers could be limiting greater female representation in Nigeria's political space. Understanding these barriers is important for improved advocacy and policymaking.

Nigeria's figures for female representation run counter to the broader trend on the continent. As of 2019, 12 countries have more than 30% of women elected to their legislatures (IPU Parline, 2020). Since 2003 Rwanda has had the highest women's legislative representation in the world, and globally, four of the top 10 countries for female representative in the legislature are in sub-Saharan Africa. In Senegal, Seychelles, and South Africa, more than 40% of parliamentary seats are held by women, while in Mozambique, Angola, Tanzania and Uganda over 35% of legislative seats are occupied by women (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019). By contrast, women in the US women held 18% of the seats in the House and 20% in the Senate as of 2013.

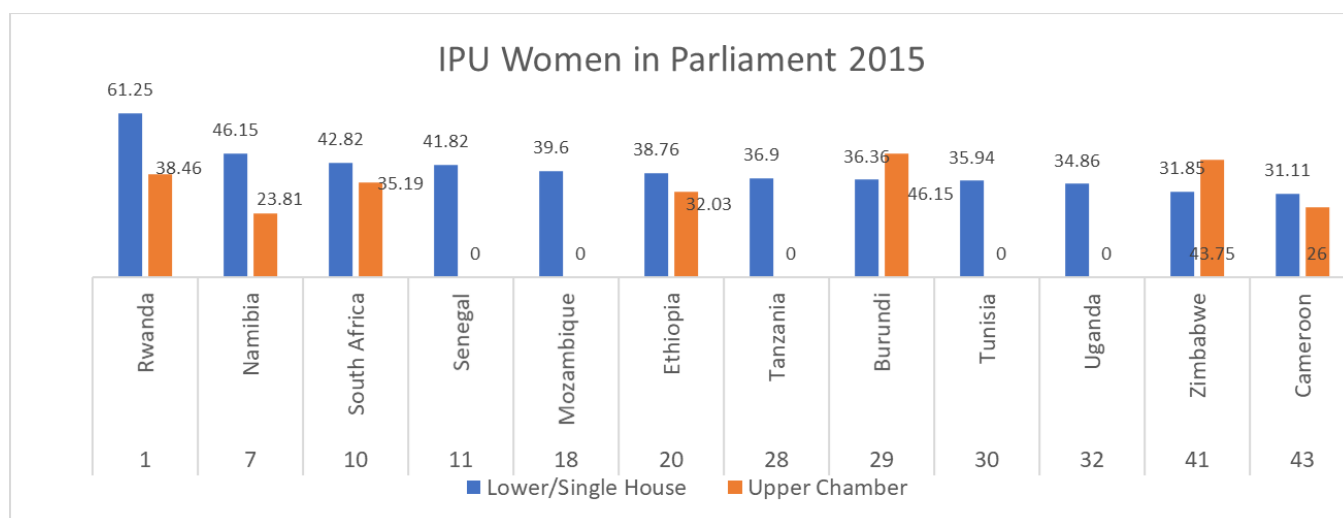
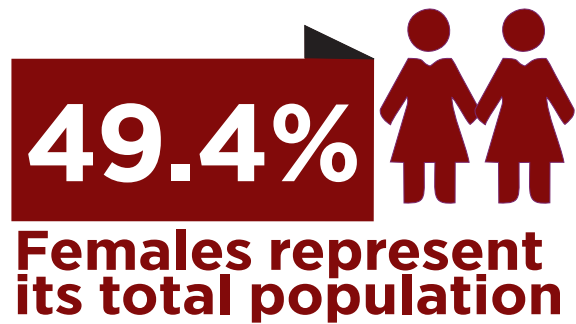


Fig.1: Abridged chart showing the 12 African countries that had elected more than 30% of women to parliament. Source : IPU <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=3&year=2019>



(Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, 2015)

These improvements can be explained by three interrelated factors: the decline of conflict in Africa; the expansion of civil liberties, particularly in the context of shifts from authoritarian to slightly more liberalised hybrid regimes, along with the emergence of autonomous women's movements that accompanied this opening; and pressure from international actors.

Since the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 1979 and the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth Conference on Women in 1995, there has been a conscious effort to bring gender equality and equity to the fore by addressing the issue of political participation of women. 22.8% of all African parliamentarians were women as of June 2016, an increase from 11.3% in 1995. But still there were 38 states in June 2016 in which women account for less than

10% of parliamentarians in single or lower houses: including four chambers with no women at all. Nigeria was one of these 38 states.

Inclusive economic growth is central to achieving the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, it cannot be achieved without political inclusion. In 2019, more than 52% of Nigerians, a majority of them women, lived on less than \$2/day (World Bank, 2019). Studies have shown that when more women work, economic growth is higher and more inclusive and having more women in political office can lead to increased growth for all. In India, for instance, research on female politicians and economic growth found that women legislators raise economic growth in their constituencies by 1.8% more, per year than their male colleagues (Baskaran 2018:3). What this means is that getting more women involved in politics will not only improve gender equality but help also help in reducing economic inequality, which is key to poverty reduction.



Historic Participation of Women

In the pre-colonial era, Nigerian women were an integral part of the political set up of their communities. For instance, in pre-colonial Bornu, women played active roles in the administration of the state, complementing the roles played by their male counterparts (Adjepong, 2015). In the 1950s, three women in Southern Nigeria were appointed into the House of Chiefs: Chief Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti (Western region), Chief Margaret Ekpo and Chief Janet Mokelu (both Eastern region).

In the immediate post-colonial era, women began to play a more active role within Nigeria's political space. In the first republic of 1960 for instance, Wuraola Esan from Western Nigeria became the first female member of the federal parliament. In 1961, Chief Margaret Ekpo contested and won an election to become a member of the Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly. Janet Mokelu and Ekpo A. Young also contested elections and won, to join Chief Ekpo in the Eastern House of Assembly. In Northern Nigeria, however, women were still denied the franchise even after independence. That only changed with the return of civilian government in 1979.

Nigeria's Second Republic (1979-1983), saw a gradual increase of participation of women in politics. In 1983, Franca Afegbua was elected to the Senate to represent Bendel North Senatorial district of what was then Bendel State, present day Edo and Delta States. But very few women contested and won elections during this period. Furthermore, only two women were appointed Federal Ministers. Chief Janet Akinrinade and Adenike Egun Oyagbola, were the Minister for Internal Affairs and Minister for National Planning, respectively.

Following the return of military rule in December 1983, the first formal quota system was introduced by the Federal Government for

the appointment of women into government. The directive required that at least one female must be appointed as a member of the Executive Council in every state. Following this development in the early 1990s, two women were appointed deputy state governors - Alhaja Latifat Okunu (Lagos) and Pamela Sadauki (Kaduna). There was, however, no female minister, nor was there a female member of the Supreme Military Council or the Armed Forces Ruling Council that replaced it.

The 1990 transition elections into local governments heralding the Third Republic saw a handful of women emerge as councillors and one woman elected as chairperson of a Local Government Council. But during the gubernatorial elections that followed no female governor emerged in any of the states and there were only two female deputy governors: Alhaja Sinatu Ojikutu of Lagos State and Cecilia Ekpenyong of Cross River State. In Senatorial elections held in 1992, Kofo Bucknor-Akerele was the only woman to win a seat. Equally, very few women were elected to the House of Representatives. One of these few was Chief Florence Ita Giwa who won in her Calabar constituency.

President Babangida's Transitional Council appointed two women in January 1993 - Emily Aik-Imhokuede and Laraba Dagash. In the Interim National Government of Chief Ernest Shonekan, two female ministers were appointed into the cabinet. The General Abacha administration (1993-98) had several female cabinet ministers, including Chief Onikepo Akande and Ambassador Judith Attah. During the military regime of General Abdulsalami Abubakar (1998-99) there were two women in the Federal Executive Council: Chief Onikepo Akande, the Minister for Commerce and Industry and Laraba Gambo Abdullahi, the Minister for Women Affairs. (Kolawale et al, 2013).



largely women were excluded from the top echelons of politics.

Following the return to democracy on 29 May 1999 there were only three women elected to the 109-member Senate and 12 in the 360 seat House of Representatives. By 2003, the numbers had improved with four women in the Senate and 21 in the House of Representatives. In 2007, the number of women elected to the Senate further increased to eight, with 28 in the House of Representatives (Omotoyosi and Iwuagwu 2018). However, women's representation has never got better than it was in 2007. In 2011 there was a decrease to seven female Senators. In 2015, there were again eight women in the Senate, but just 19 in the House of Representatives - with an average age of 50. After the conclusion of the 2019 elections,

there were still eight women in the Senate but a further dip in the number of women in the House of Representative, meant that they had returned to 1999 levels, with just 12 elected.

Two decades of uninterrupted democracy in Nigeria has done little to improve female representation. Of the 1,543 elected government officials at the 2019 general election only 68 were women: less than 5%. Women were even more marginalised in the 2019 general elections despite the clamour for younger candidates and fresher political voices and the fact that there were six female presidential aspirants. However, the fact that all six female presidential candidates stepped down in the months preceding the vote, helped fuel a narrative that women remain not ready to contest.

Nigeria's 9th Parliament

In the 2019 election, 232 women, forming 12.3% of candidates, contested for seats in the Senate. The two dominant political parties, the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and its main opposition the People's Democratic Party (PDP) fielded a total of 17 female candidates. Of the eight elected all, came from Nigeria's two leading parties, with six representing the PDP and just two winning seats on the APC platform. In the House of Representatives, 533 women contested, with the APC and PDP fielding 31 female candidates. Of the 12 elected, nine did so having stood on the APC ticket, two represented the PDP and one came from the All Progressives Grand Alliance, who won two House of Representative seats in total. Getting on the ticket of a leading party is hard, as the data shows, but it increases the chances women will win significantly.



SENATE



HOUSE OF REP



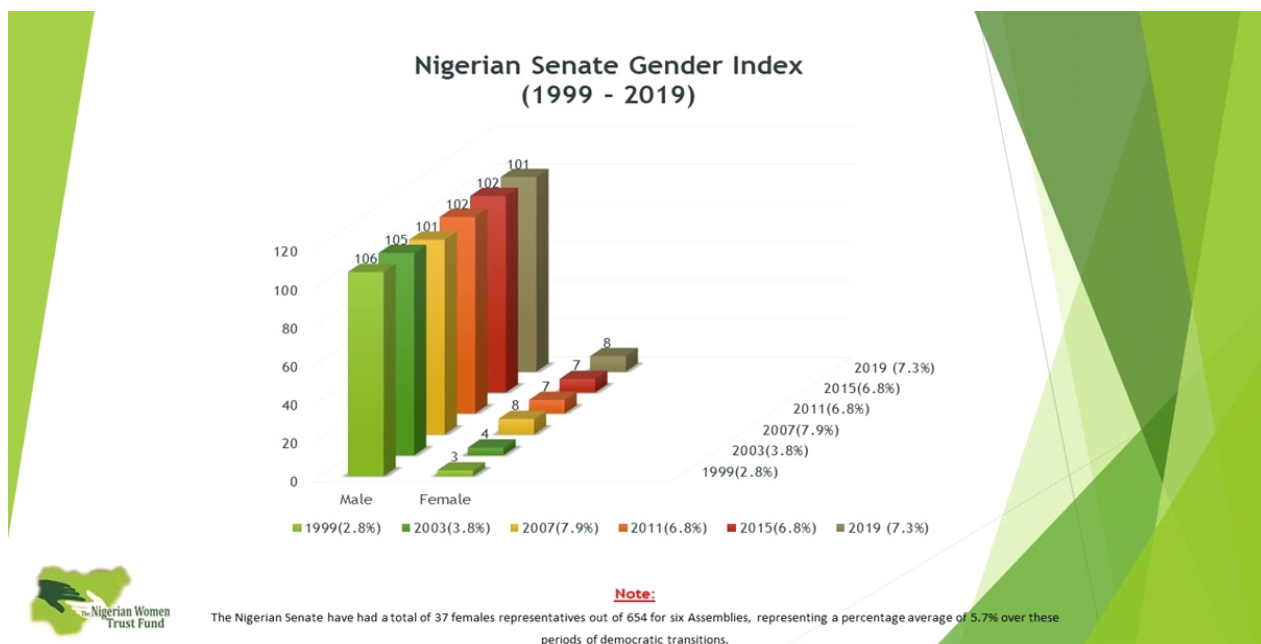


Fig. 2: Women elected to Nigerian Senate between 1999 and 2019
 Source: Nigerian Women Trust Fund

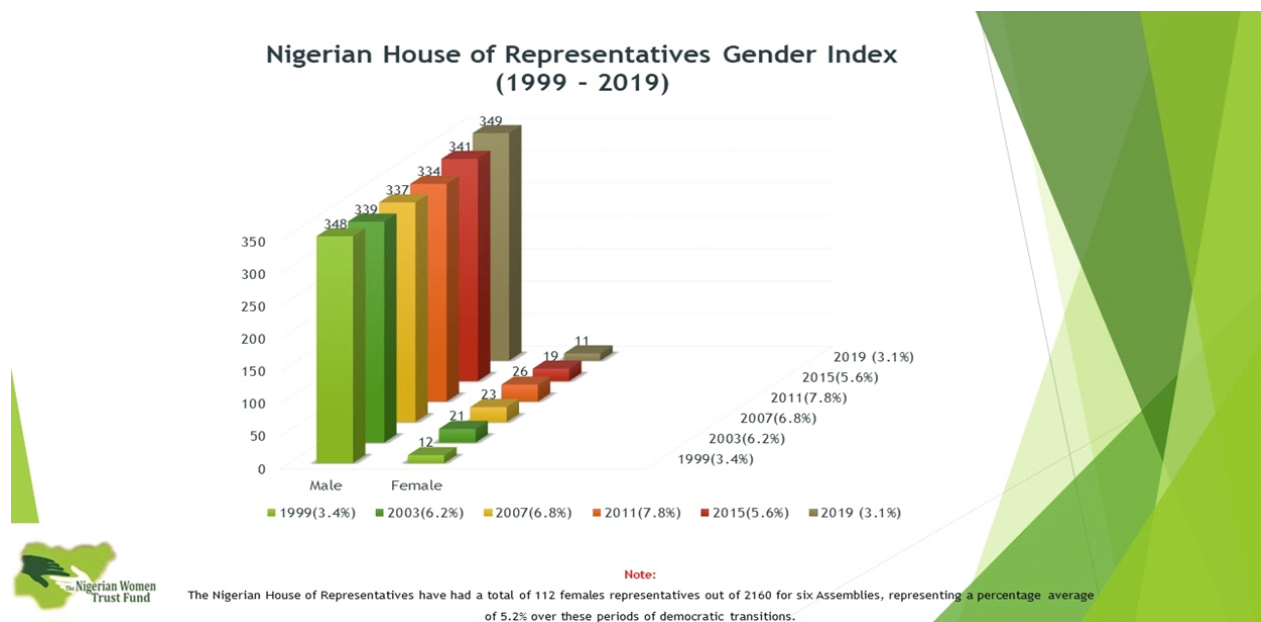


Fig.3: Women elected to Nigerian Federal House of Representatives between 1999 and 2019
 Source: Nigerian Women Trust Fund

At the state level, no woman was elected governor despite forming 3.1% of the total candidates. Of the 275 women who ran as candidates for the deputy governorship, four - in Enugu, Kaduna, Ogun and Rivers - were elected. At the State House of Assembly level, preliminary analysis shows that 40 women were elected across the country.

Overall, of the 64 women in elective positions after the 2019 vote, the opposition PDP has the highest number with 33 (52.6%), whilst the ruling APC has just 24 (38%) while the remaining 7 (9.4%) candidates are spread across other smaller political. Currently, there are 10 states in Nigeria without a single female legislator. The whole concept of democracy is incomplete if there is no representation of the different segments of society at this level.

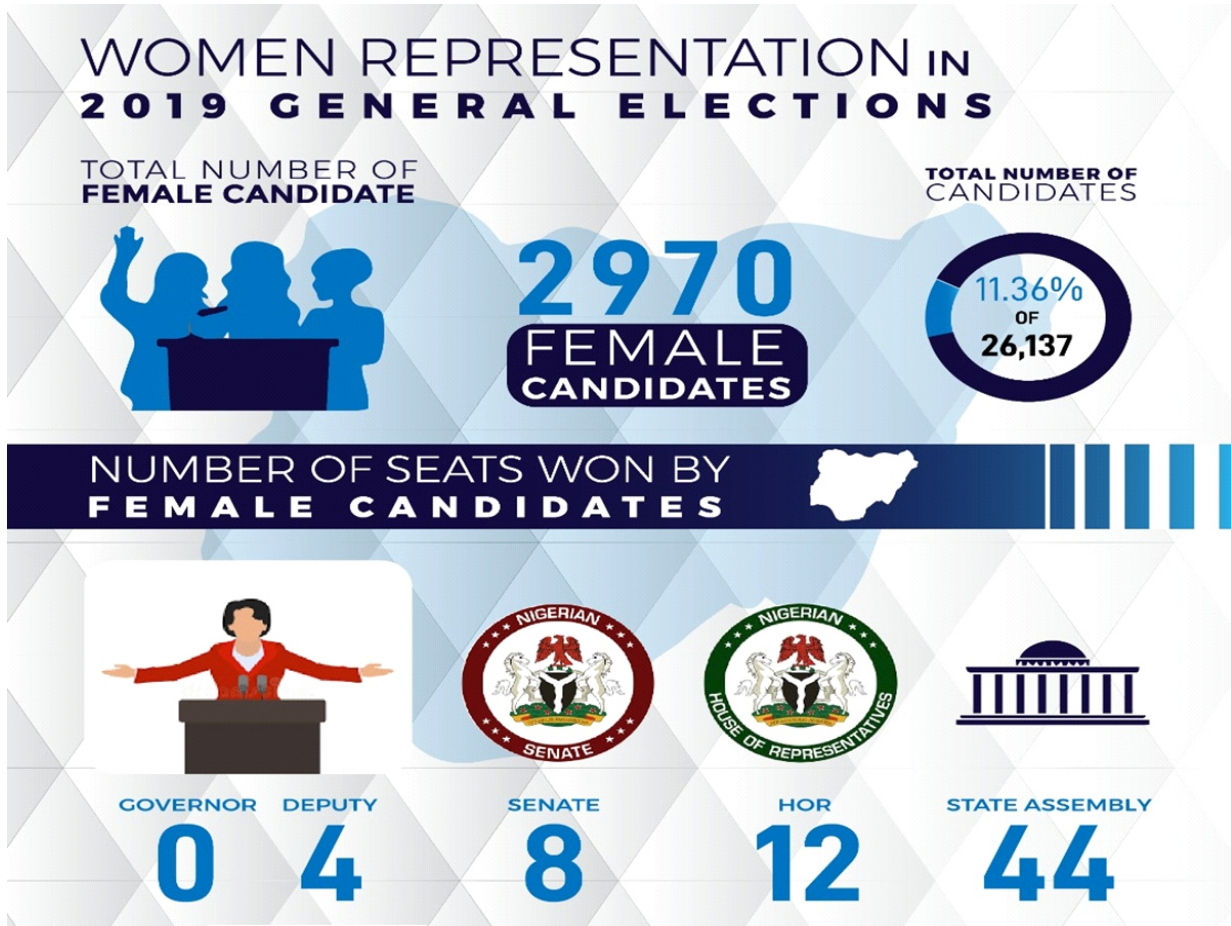


Fig.4: Women Representation in the 2019 General Elections. Source: CDD, 2020.

Barriers Women Face

Income inequality is one of the major obstacles to women's political participation in Nigeria. While other obstacles such as patriarchy, cultural and religious gender restrictions, gender stereotyping and electoral violence stand in the way of women's involvement in politics, women with limited finances, regardless of their ability, struggle to make headway in Nigeria's money-based political terrain. For young women, the situation is even more difficult as the patriarchal and largely age-defined space that is characteristic of Nigerian politics leaves little opportunity for them to get sponsorship.

For example, Ndi Kato who ran in Jema'a Constituency for the Kaduna State House of Assembly in 2019 spent over N4 million on her campaign at the expression of interest stage alone. Nigeria does not have a strong

institutional framework limiting campaign expenditure and this makes getting on the ballot difficult.

Faced with these obstacles many women choose to run on the ticket of smaller parties, but this reduces their chances of winning. Rinsola Abiola made an audacious move from the APC to Action Democratic Party (ADP) having previously served as the President of the APC Young Women Forum (APC-YWF). As a former Special Assistant on New Media to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Yakubu Dogara, she took a stance to challenge the undemocratic APC primary processes. Though she lost at the general election, Rinsola ran instead on the platform of the ADP in Ogun State for the House of Representatives. Abeokuta North/Obafemi Owode/O... Federal Constituency. On leaving APC, Ri

said “my problem is not with APC at the national level. All politics is local... we are seeking for youth and women inclusion but if we accept this tyranny as a norm, then I believe that by the time we are in charge of these structures we will do the same to the people after us.”

Gender stereotyping and cultural and religious limitations are another major barrier to women’s political participation in Nigeria. Research on gender stereotypes has found that many young women avoid the public space primarily because the morality of women in leadership positions is often questioned – a negative but efficient tool that allows the current occupants of public offices across the political space to continue to hold sway (Ellemers 2018; van Geel 2016). For those who bravely enter the space, they are faced with familiar challenges of sexism, ageism, patriarchy, religion, culture and the almost impossible task of upending established political structures designed to keep a hold on power. Most cultural and religious institutions in Nigeria still have a male-centric perspective on leadership. The preference of male over female leadership is largely shaped by both religious and cultural institutions.

Most political parties in Nigeria tend to share this patriarchal ideology when it comes to ideas of leadership. This plays out in discrimination against women seeking to run for office. Most female candidates that contested in previous elections report one form of discrimination or another from within their political party. Even amongst women in political parties, young women are constantly discriminated against and asked to wait for their time or simply told to start a family before they venture into the political space. This discrimination sometimes even comes from older female aspirants. This is largely due to a culture that elevates a woman’s marital status beyond everything else. The discrimination of young women is further compounded by the political landscape where party caucus meetings and elections are mostly held at nocturnal times and in shady venues where ‘decent’ women are not expected to be found (see Osori, 2017).

Nigeria’s two major political parties were accused of not allowing women ‘enough space’ at a reflection meeting run by YIAGA in April 2019. “We failed because there were very few female candidates in the two major parties,” explained Abiodun Essiet, who contested in the primary of the APC in Orozo Ward of Abuja Municipal Area Council. Essiet, a nurse and gender activist had hoped of becoming the first woman elected councillor in the ward. But she did not make it out of the primary, which was adjudged to be fraught with irregularities. “The most important election is the primaries and only a handful of women scaled through in the major parties, so we already knew this was going to happen,” she said. In many instances, “women and young people were either intimidated or threatened to step down or were simply screened out and replaced with their male competitors” according to Dr Ezekwesili, who was one of the six women who stood for the presidency in 2019. Ezekwesili, a former minister, said that the dominant political parties “have entrenched a primaries system that inherently makes the emergence of women and young candidates near impossible.”

Away from party politics, other factors such as large-scale election violence, threats, vote-rigging and vote-buying were said to have played against women. “I faced a lot of threat up till election day,” said Christina Eligwe-Ude, a former consultant at the United Nations who contested the APC primaries for the Orlu, Orsu and Oru East Federal Constituency in Imo State. Mrs Eligwe-Ude, who would later leave the APC to contest under the Social Democratic Party (SDP), stated that “the experience was exhausting and depressing because it’s money politics...we were at a tribunal for the election to be nullified because it was initially declared inconclusive but nine days later, it became ‘conclusive’ suddenly and the PDP candidate was declared (the) winner”.

Natasha Akpoti, a 39-year old lawyer and social advocate contested for governor in Kogi state amidst intimidation and electoral violence, state suppression and a patriarchal system. Running on the SDP platform she placed third. The



In the South-South, a female candidate's husband was kidnapped but her mother-in-law who had warned her not to go into politics chastised and accused her, saying she "traded her son (the husband) for political conquest".

her 9,482 votes were just 4.7% of the votes won, by the victor and incumbent, Yahaya Bello.

At the YIAGA workshop, young female candidates documented how they experienced betrayal from party agents who switched allegiances after they were bought over. In a constituency in the North-Central, a female candidate's campaign manager tried to use sex as a prerequisite to obtain money that had been specifically donated to fund her campaign. "He knew that the election had given me exposure, and he wanted to ruin my chances. The money he collected for me, [donated for my campaign] he has it in his pocket," she stated. Another female candidate in the South-West was sexually harassed by a state governor who condescendingly flattered her by telling her how lucky she is and promised to give her "the whole society" if she accepted to become one

of his mistresses.

One of the youngest female candidates at the reflection meeting who was in her mid-twenties was both a victim of her age and marital status. She was beaten up, for saying "no" to a sexual predator, who had promised support to her but threatened to continue assaulting her because she refused to have sex with him. In the South-South, a female candidate's husband was kidnapped but her mother-in-law who had warned her not to go into politics chastised and accused her, saying she "traded her son (the husband) for political conquest".



Fig.1: Campaign posters of selected female aspirants in the 2019 general election

Case Study – A Female President?

In the 2019 general elections, six women vied for the presidency: Dr Obiageli Ezekwesili, Eunice Atuejide, Funmilayo Adesanya-Davis, Oluremi Comfort Sonaiya, Elishama Rosemary Ideh and Adeline Iwuagwu-Emihe. Of these six, only four made it onto the presidential ballot. Lucy Atuejide and Dr. Oby Ezekwesili withdrew from the race shortly before the general election. Of the six, Sonaiya and Ezekwesili were the most prominent. Prof Sonaiya was not new to the race having previously contested for President in 2015. After which she stated that “we cannot have a situation where women will continue to remain as mere spectators in the business of politics. “However, mixed reactions trailed Oby Ezekwesili’s October 2018 declaration to run for president in which she announced, “I am running to win. I have no place for failure in this race because I am not running alone. I am running with the Nigerian people who are fed up with a political class of the old order who have failed them in every sense of the definition of failure. So, we are going to run. We are running. The citizens are running.”

Ezekwesili, a former minister, is known for her unyielding criticism of successive governments, most notably for their handling of the 2014 abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok as leader of Bring Back Our Girls. Her international profile and formidable reputation made her stand out among the other women candidates and informed the widespread belief that if any woman could become president, it would be her. Therefore, her withdrawal from the race in January 2019 was significant. From a gender perspective, it narrowed women’s chances and was a lost opportunity to re-test Nigeria’s pulse on the prospect of a female president.

Efforts to Close the Gaps

The volatile and patriarchal nature of politics in Nigeria implicitly constrains women’s participation in politics. This in turn results in the low political representation of women in government and shortages in the number of elected women representatives. However, several efforts by civil society organisations (CSOs) to close the gender disparity between men and women in governance have culminated in successes that are worthy of note.

YIAGA Africa – Ready to Run

YIAGA Africa led several youth led-civil society groups to champion the Not Too Young to Run Bill which amended sections 65, 106,131 and 177 of Nigeria 1999 Constitution. The landmark assent by President Muhammadu Buhari in 2018 reduced age limits for different elective office and paved the way for young Nigerian to vie for political positions. Following its passage young people were mobilised across political lines nationwide to build their capacity and offered technical and financial support. A total of 103 young people aged between 18 and 35 won seats at various levels of government, with

many entering politics for the first time in Nigeria. However, out of these 103 elected officials, only two were females. These further demonstrate that young women continue to be marginalised in Nigerian politics. Despite the poor numbers of young women elected in 2019, the removal of age barriers, through the bill sponsored by YIAGA, remains a significant step towards closing the gender gap and can support the recruitment of more young women into politics.

Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NUTF) – Young Women Leaders/Mentorship Program and Young Women in Politics Forum (YWiPF)

Since its founding in 2011, NUTF has supported the election campaigns of over 200 women through technical support and capacity development. It also leads the She In Movement in Nigeria – a coalition of women



groups pushing for inclusion and equal gender representation. The Fund has carried out voter education for over 130,000 women across Nigeria, built the capacity of over 1,200 women to sensitise other women to cause a ripple effect across the states. It has also built the capacity of over 1,100 female politicians and mobilised more than 4,000 young men and women as active citizens with online advocacy reaching up to 10 million users across various social media platforms (Baruwa 2018).

In 2015, as part of efforts by other women-led groups to reverse the trend and close the gender gaps in politics, NWTF championed young women leadership and mentorship programmes and engaged in the registration of young women into the political arena in Nigeria. This aimed to ensure an intergenerational transfer of knowledge and a constant supply of a critical mass and pool of young women to carry on the baton in leadership. This birthed the idea of a movement for young women with political inclinations that would span the political divide and that can push for change and negotiate spaces for young women. Unfortunately, none of the members of the Young Women in Politics Forum won seats in the 2019 general elections, although more than ten of them have been appointed to various positions at national and state level since 2016 (NWTF, 2019).

Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) – Capacity Building for Young Women in Politics

Between 2017 and 2019, CDD made a lot of efforts to closing the political representation gap; the Centre amplified the voices and profiled aspiring female politicians in partnership with Premium Times Online Newspaper. Specifically, in 2017 the Centre called for applications from suitably qualified female candidates for a fully funded capacity-building workshop for women politicians in Nigeria. The objective of the training was to strengthen the capacity of female aspirants in the areas of political communication, campaigns and voter mobilisation, advocacy and lobbying and policy design, and to build a

network of women across the federation. At the end of the workshop, participants were further educated on the provisions of the Electoral Act and equipped with strategies for conducting issued-based campaign based on the Get-Out-The-Vote tactics training. Four of the 35 participants would later win party nomination as candidate for the 2019 election and only one would successfully be elected as member of the State House of Assembly.

Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC)– Underrepresented

In 2017, PLAC screened a documentary 'Underrepresented' on women's political participation in Nigeria. The documentary was part of PLAC's project on "Expanding Political Participation of Women in Nigeria" which was supported by the Ford Foundation. The project is set against a background that recognises inclusiveness as a key indicator of good governance and understands that Nigeria is faced with the challenge of non-inclusiveness in its governance processes with women being partly or excluded from participation in any decision-making processes.

The project recognised that there have been many efforts by various women and women interest groups in Nigeria to open the space for women's participation in politics and decision-making through capacity development of women and campaigns for the adoption of positive legislation and gender quotas. The project facilitated discussions and created experience sharing platforms for women and policymakers, documenting experiences of women in the political space and sharing the same via storytelling.

Other frontline women's groups including the Women's Advocacy, Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC), Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA), Women's Aid Collective (WACOL) and Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre (CIRDOC) have pioneered numerous initiatives to push for young women's participation in governance in Nigeria.



Criticisms of current advocacy on women's political participation

Novel as all these projects are, there is a fundamental challenge with the approach to women's political representation in Nigeria especially within the ranks of civil society groups advocating for greater representation of women in Nigerian politics. It remains largely uncoordinated, one-off and sometimes a 'tick the box' that lacks a viable sustainability plan.

Political empowerment interventions tend to offer universalised solutions that emphasise better access to resources and capacity building for women. However, Nigerian women are anything but homogenous, and their access to political power is mediated by region, religion, culture, class, age, education, and social networks. Indeed, among the obstacles to greater women's participation remain the gulfs among women caused by such differences. There is a need for data that disaggregates the disparate needs and experiences of individual women in politics to facilitate better tailored interventions.

Many studies around women in Nigerian politics still focus on numbers over substance. While it is given that women have found their way into high profile positions in government, such as the office of the deputy governor, the nature of power they exercise is sometimes overlooked as this position rarely translates to their significance in the grand scheme of things. More questions need to be

asked about the nature of women's political power and the terms of their participation as these are critical to obtaining a more holistic view of women's political activity.

Furthermore, most political empowerment interventions undertaken by civil society groups appear to follow a fundamental assumption that the more women hold political power, the more they will empower and facilitate access for other women. But rarely has this been the case, partly because most women in power are not necessarily gender-conscious or feminist; hence, their increased political presence does not automatically translate to better future access for women. The responsibility of deepening women's political engagement in Nigeria, therefore, should not be the sole prerogative of women activists and politicians but of all Nigerians.

Gender discrimination is well rooted in Nigeria's political space. These attitudes often play out in the unfair treatment women political aspirants receive from political parties when they bid to fly the parties banner during elections. Empowerment cannot happen without recognising and addressing the repressive cultural values that underlie nearly all the factors that orchestrate and sustain women's political marginalisation in Nigeria today.

Catalysing Change

Civil society groups need to focus on the big picture. Building networks and alliances with all political stakeholders can lead to an expansion of the space for dialogue, conversations, and actions. These actions can create an enabling environment and provide resources for more young women to engage in politics. Currently, women's political participation and young women's political participation is considered the 'problem' or focus of women-led and youth-led civil society organisations.

Political parity at all levels of governance is critical to Nigeria's sustainable development and this can only be achieved through strategic and sustained advocacy, capacity building, research as well as technical and financial resources for women. Inequality lies at the root of poverty and violence. Gender parity in governance is critical to ending

inequality.

Consistent mentorship and leadership programmes that will ensure that there is an intergenerational transfer of knowledge amongst women are key. Youth and young women wings of political parties, the Young Women in Politics Forum and campaigns like #ElectHerNG and #ReadyToRun are the sorts of movements needed to tilt the scales. These forums and movements can, in the short-term catalyse the desperately needed change and build traction to close the intergenerational gap amongst women in politics in Nigeria by providing a platform for cross-learning, exchange of ideas and mobilisation of supporters across political parties. In the long-term, such forums can continuously build a pool of young women leaders in Nigeria who can fill elective non-elective positions



Issues and Challenges

According to a 2019 report on women leadership and political participation, women's leadership in political decision-making processes improves them (UN Women, 2019). The report notes that "women demonstrate political leadership by working across party lines through parliamentary women's caucuses - even in the most politically combative environments - and by championing issues of gender equality, such as the elimination of gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws and electoral reform". However, these possibilities are not without challenges:

- 1 Socio-cultural factors and societal norms-** patriarchy, religion and culture play a critical role in the socialisation process. There is a need for a conscious effort towards changing perception about women's roles in society to include leadership. Women are placed on a higher moral pedestal than men. A woman's political ambition is scrutinised through a moral lens and her virtue is employed as a political tool to discourage and taunt women who venture into the political sphere.
- 2 Shrinking democratic and civic space -** everyday, the stakes are getting higher in the political landscape in Nigeria and when the stakes are high, marginalised, and vulnerable groups like women and young people are often the first to be excluded. As more women join the civic space, the resentment towards women may lead to a perception among more conservative voices that women are pushing too hard to be heard.
- 3 Violence and insecurity -** women often shun violence and hardly ever incite violence but suffer its impacts. Electoral violence, thuggery and hooliganism are serious deterrents to women's participation.
- 4 The electorate -** the voting class are yet to come to terms with the capacities and diversities that women can bring to the decision-making table. Advocacy and sensitisation are key to changing such perceptions. Poor electoral knowledge and civic responsibility around elections mean that practices like vote-buying remain common.
- 5 Capacity -** women are late bloomers in the political space. Following the return to democratic rule in 1999, only a handful of women were granted appointive or elective offices. Women often require capacity building and exchange programmes that will build their capacity to run structured and targeted campaigns.
- 6 Financing -** running for political positions in Nigerian requires huge financial resources. The system has been saturated with men who have access to a lot of money and most women lack the financial capital to run the race competitively.
- 7 Unethical practices -** many political parties lack ideologies and this breeds a lack of internal party democracy. Nocturnal meetings, money politics and other backhand practices further alienate young women.



Opportunities and Prospects

The enactment of the Not-Too-Young-To-Run Act demonstrates how coordinated and concerted advocacy for change can result in far-reaching institutional reforms. Nigeria's 1999 Constitution made provisions for affirmative action with respect to ensuring that the composition of the government is consistent with the principle of Federal Character. Unfortunately, the affirmative action advocated by the constitution falls short of guaranteeing or ensuring equal representation in government based on gender. Although there are currently no constitutional barriers to women's participation in politics, recognising the silence of the Nigerian constitution on the question of affirmative action with regards to equal representation of both sexes should become the centrepiece of civil society groups efforts to increase female participation in Nigerian politics.

A legally enforced electoral gender quota would compel political parties to maintain a minimum quota for women in their internal candidate recruitment processes. The 2008 Justice Uwais Electoral Reform Report recommended that 30% of party candidate seats should be reserved for women (Nwankwor and Nkereuwem, 2019). But this recommendation was not included in the amended 2010 Electoral Act.

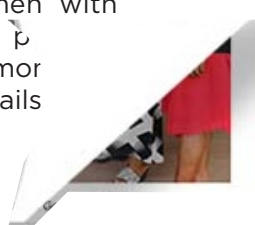
One might argue that this legislative approach may yield little considering the "unimpressive" impact of Not-Too-Young-To-Run Act on number of youths elected in the 2019 general election. The idea, however, is that an institutional provision guaranteeing certain quota for women would gradually compel power brokers within political parties and political financiers – who are predominantly men – to consider more seriously, eligible and credible female aspirants. Other countries that have institutionalised electoral gender quota show what is possible.

Following the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by the UN in 1995, gender quotas have become one form of affirmative action or equal opportunity measures to move toward gender balance within the polity (Chen 2010). The Senegalese Gender Parity Law, signed by former Senegalese President

Abdoulaye Wade in 2010, is an example of how constitutional provisions for electoral quotas for women can improve women participation and representation in politics. The law which obliges all political parties to place women and men in an alternating matter on candidate lists - aiming to achieve a 50:50 male-female ratio - has seen the number of women elected to the country's National Assembly increase from 22.7% to 42.7% (Tøraasen 2017). Far-reaching institutional reforms that create electoral spaces for women remain the most potent strategy for increasing female participation, and representation, in Nigerian politics.

With Nigeria's next general election scheduled to take place in 2023, the next two years, are a prime window of opportunity to push reforms through an administration headed by a president coming to the end of his second, and final term, in office. Nigeria's Gender Policy complies with the Beijing Declaration on gender quotas, which states that at least 35% of public seats and positions should be reserved for women. However, the practical application of this recommended quota is neither reflected in political appointments nor in elective positions. What is needed therefore is legislation to make the 35% affirmative action provision, law. Sustained and targeted advocacy towards key administration interlocutors who are interested in pushing reforms should be taking place now, before they become absorbed by a shift in focus towards the 2023 elections.

There is also a need to improve the way female political aspirants are written about, and hence perceived, in Nigeria's media. Women are treated unfairly in the media, and this affects the way voters think about them. To win over the media, women's movements and support networks need to find the right strategy to engage the media industry in changing the narratives around gender in Nigeria and more importantly help in amplifying the voices of women seeking elective positions across the various sectors of government. The growing influence of social media also provides a platform through which young women with political aspirants can increase their political capital without recourse to the huge moral costs that traditional electioneering entails





Way Forward

What is clear is that there needs to be continuous mobilising and recruiting of young women into political parties. Nigerian political parties, including two leading parties, APC and the PDP, have shown limited commitment to gender inclusion within their administrative structures. Most of the parties have the office of Women Leader at various levels of party hierarchy; however, this has not translated to accelerated recruitment of young women into political parties.

Ambitious recruitment of young women into political parties is critical to inclusion and an inter-generational supply of women in leadership. This needs to happen alongside increased public advocacy aimed at changing negative perceptions and stereotypes that mean women are encouraged to only aspire to raise a family, not to lead. Engaging male champions of change, political parties, institutional and non-institutional gatekeepers (traditional & religious rulers) and challenging internal party structures is imperative to both creating spaces for women and in changing restrictive social norms militating the long belief that leadership is “strictly” men’s business.

To support female aspirants, dedicated technical and financial resources are needed to allow female politicians to

engage with the political process through issue-based campaigns. Communication strategies using traditional and non-traditional media campaigns that foster and sustain behavioural change, conversations and discourses around leadership and mentorship are strategic advocacy tools that can swing the tide for young women. These kinds of support will allow women to push their agendas forward and can also inspire a new generation of female leaders.

Despite ranking as one of the biggest democracies in the world, Nigeria’s record in terms of equitable representation of women in politics falls short. Women account for less than 10% of elected officials in the country; with women aged 35 and below accounting for just a fraction of this figure. Young people, especially young women, bring fresh perspectives to leadership. Nigeria cannot claim to be practising democratic governance when certain demographics are almost totally alienated and excluded from democratic processes and systems. Nigeria must quickly learn that no country can achieve true and sustainable development without elevating the status of women.



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Appendix 1

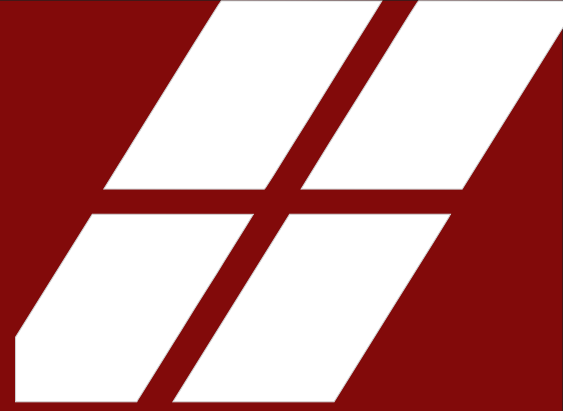
S/N	STATE	DISTRICT	CANDIDATES	(%)	PARTY
SENATORS					
1	Adamawa	CENTRAL	DAHIRU AISHATU AHMED	7.3%	APC
2	AKWA IBOM	SOUTH	EYAKENYI AKON ETIM		PDP
3	ANAMBRA	NORTH	ODUAH STELLA A. PRINCESS		PDP
4		CENTRAL	UCHE LILIAN EKWUNIFE		PDP
5	CROSS RIVERS	NORTH	OKO ROSE OKOJI (Deceased)		PDP
6	LAGOS	CENTRAL	TINUBU OLUREMI SHADE		APC
7	RIVERS	WEST	BETTY APAIFI		PDP
8	EKITI	SOUTH	ABIODUN OLUJIMI		PDP
MEMBERS OF FEDERAL HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE					
9	ABIA	ISUIKWUATO/UMUNEOCHI	NKEIRUKA C. ONYEJEOCHA	3.3%	APC
10	ANAMBRA	ONITSHA NORTH/SOUTH	LYNDA CHUBA IKPEAZU		PDP
11	BENUE	OTUKPO/OHIMINI	ONUH ONYECHE BLESSING		APGA
12	BORNO	BAMA/NGALA/KALA-BALGE	ZAINAB GIMBA		APC
13	EKITI	IJERO/EKITI WEST/EFON	OGUNLOLA O. OLUBUNMI		APC
14	GOMBE	DUKKU/ NAFADA	AISHATU JIBRIL DUKKU		APC
15	OGUN	IKENNE/SHAGAMU/REMO N.	ONANUGA A. ORİYOMI		APC
16	OSUN	AYEDAADA/IREWOLE/ISOKA N	TAIWO OLUKEMI OLUGA		APC
17	OYO	OLUYOLE	TOLULOPE AKANDE-SADIPE		APC
18	PLATEAU	LANGTANG N./LANGTANG	BENI BUTMAK LAR		PDP
19	YOBE	DAMATURU/GUJBA/GULANI/TARMUWA	KHADIJA BUKAR A. IBRAHIM		APC
20	IMO	ISIALA/MBANO/OKIGWE/ONUIMO FEDERAL CONSTITUENCY	MARIAN ONUOHA		APC

Appendix 2

Table 2: Showing available information on women representatives at all levels of governance 1999 – March 2019

Office	1999		2003		2007		2011		2015		2019	
	SA	W	SA	W	SA	W	SA	W	SA	W	SA	W
President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Senate	109	3(2.8)	109	4(3.7)	109	9(8.3)	109	7(6.4)	109	8(7.3)	109	8(7.3)
Hof Reprs.	360	7(1.9)	360	21(5.8)	360	27(6.9)	360	19(5.3)	360	19(5.3)	360	11(3.1)
Governor	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0
Dep. Governor	-										36	4
State HoA	990	24(2.4)	990	40(3.9)	990	57(5.8)	990	69(7)	990	50(5.1)	990	44
LGA Chair	710	13(1.8)	774	15(1.9)	740	27(3.6)	740	-	774	0	774	NA
Councillors	6368	69(1.1)	6368	267(4.2)	6368	235(3.7)	6368	-	6368	0	6368	NA

Legend: W – Women; SA – Seats Available



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