

WOMEN'S (FEMALE GENDER) POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS OF PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Plateau State and Nigeria at large has been recording low participation of women in both elective and appointive positions. This is a growing concern to many Nigerians. However, concerted efforts have been made by government and non-governmental organizations to increase the level of participation of women in politics in line with the declaration made at the fourth World Conference on women in Beijing, which advocated 30% affirmative action. In Nigeria, the extant National Gender Policy (NGP) recommended 35% affirmative action instead and sought for a more inclusive representation of women with at least 35% of both elective political and appointive public service positions respectively. The under representation of women in political participation gained root due to the patriarchal practice inherent in our society, much of which were obvious from pre-colonial era till date. However, the re-introduction of democratic governance has witnessed once again an increase in women political participation both in elective and appointive offices. The national average of women's political participation in Nigeria has remained below 7 percent in elective and appointive positions, which is far below the global average of 22.5 percent, Africa regional average of 23.4 percent and West African sub regional average of 15 percent. In Plateau State in particular, there has never been a female governor but the state has had two female deputy governors in 2007 and 2023 respectively. In the state assembly, women representation has never been above 8%. In 2015, the state had 2 female legislators representing 8%, 1 female legislator representing 4% in 2019 and none in 2023. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended among others that the Plateau State government through the Gender and Equal Opportunities Commission should make and implement a policy on Inclusive Equal Gender Leadership at the Local Government Councils that will empower women politically. This will ensure that every candidate for Chairmanship position chooses another gender as a running mate. This will empower women to participate in politics and contribute meaningfully to the development of the State.

KEY WORDS: Women, Female, Political Empowerment, Participation, Politics

INTRODUCTION

Women political representation in Nigeria, in particular, since the return to democracy in 1999 has been quite low and is estimated to be less than 10% both in elective and appointive positions (Awe, 2015). Plateau State is not an exception, with less than 5% representation in both elective and appointive positions (Kabir, 2020). In Nigeria and the Sub-Saharan Africa at large, what hinders women's political participation in the region has been largely attributed to patriarchy, low women education, low financial status and relegating women to domestic duties (Fadako, 2015). In many families today, many women as either daughters, sisters, mothers, widows, wives etc have become heads of families due to some social and economic factors such as divorce, separation or loss of jobs, widowhood, violent conflicts, among others.

Furthermore, the issue of patriarchy dominates the African and Nigerian scenery where women are viewed as second class or inferior citizens and therefore their political participation roles are mainly relegated to voting and campaign activities. Despite Nigeria being a signatory to the 1995 Beijing Affirmative Action which clearly stipulates that women should be accorded at least 30% in decision-making positions, women political representation in Nigeria has never been up to 10% (Irabor, 2015). This evidence points to the fact that women may have been marginalized by socio-political structures dominated by men in the Nigerian political sphere. However, Nigeria has had a

few of women politically appointed into the leadership positions who have served credibly. These women include but are not limited to late Professor Dora Akunyili who was the first Chairman of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration Control (NAFDAC), before she was elevated to a Federal Minister. Nigeria also has Dr. Ngozi Okonjo- Iweala who served twice as a Federal Minister of Finance and Coordinator of the Economy and is currently the Director-General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Again, Mrs. Amina Mohammed served as a Federal Minister of Environment and is currently a Deputy Secretary- General of the United Nations Organisation (UNO). Plateau State too has had two capable women who have been appointed and served as Federal Ministers in the persons of Dame Pauline Tallen, a former Deputy Governor and Dr. Sarah Reng Ocheke. Although they were not elected but appointed, policies and programmes under the leadership of these women were developed and implemented for the sustainable development of the entire country. One of such policies was the revision of the National Gender Policy of 2006 in 2022 by the then Minister of Women Affairs, Dame, Pauline Tallen. In the legislative arm of government, Plateau State has had few women elected into the State Assembly and House of Representatives like Rt. Hon. Joyce Rannap and Hon. Beni Lar who served for two terms and four terms respectively. Presently too, Plateau State has a female Deputy Governor and a former legislator, in the person of Ngo Josephine Piyo (Yakubu, 2020).

The revised National Gender Policy of 2022, is aimed at increasing the number of women in political office, party organs, and public life by setting a goal of 35 % Affirmative Action in favor of women. It is also aimed at promoting gender equality and inclusion in public life. However, it is clear that women in Nigeria are yet to benefit from these provisions as less than 10 % hold political offices. For example, the Senate in 2022 threw out a Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill which could have afforded Nigeria the opportunity to domesticate some of the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. The Bill was opposed by male senators (Goitom, 2022) and women could do nothing as the Nigerian parliament used a voice voting system. It might have been passed had there been gender parity in the Senate. Such male domination has significantly impeded the protection and promotion of women's representation and their contribution to national development.

Geisler (2015) asserts that women political marginalization may have its roots in the activities and nomination processes of the political parties. In most Nigerian political parties, the role of women is mainly relegated to that of vote canvassing. Women who aspire to contest for political positions are often denied party tickets due either to their poor financial strength or patriarchal nature of Nigerian political party structures, lack of sufficient social and political capital among others. It is an established fact that general elections are only contested by candidates presented by registered political parties. Therefore, if women are denied victory at the primary elections, then their chances of getting into elective political offices would have been nullified already. Plateau State has had two female Deputy Governors, Dame Pauline Tallen (PDP, 2007-2011) and presently, Ngo Josephine Piyo (PDP, 2023 to date), both elected with their principals into the leadership of the State.

Several institutional frameworks are however, in place to foster women's political participation and representation in Plateau State and Nigeria a whole. These frameworks include the 1999 Constitution, policies, international treaties, conventions and protocols and the National Gender Policy and the Gender and Equal Opportunities Commission, among others. However, despite the existence of these frameworks, women political participation still remains low. Given the low participation and representation of women in politics in Plateau State, this study was prompted to analyse the impact of women's political empowerment on their participation in politics in Plateau State, Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES: The study seeks to critically assess women's (female gender) political empowerment and participation in politics of Plateau State, Nigeria, taking into cognizance the factors that militate

against women’s political empowerment and participation in politics and the impact of women political empowerment on political participation in Plateau State

RE-INTRODUCTION OF DEMOCRACY (The Fourth Republic)

The return of democracy in May 29, 1999 gave hope for a new dawn in the struggle for more participation of women in Nigeria politics. Democracy is about fair representation of all interest groups in the society and the low representation of women is a violation of the principle of democracy. Despite all efforts put in place, Nigeria is yet to meet the 30% and 35% affirmation as contained in Beijing Platform for Action and National Gender Policy respectively. There have been seven administrations between 1999 and 2023. Former President Obasanjo occupied the office of president between 1999 and 2007, President Umaru Musa Yaradua (2007-2010), President Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2011; 2011-2015) and late President Muhammadu Buhari from 2015 to 2023 and presently 2023 till date President Ahmed Bola Tinubu. The position of vice president in Nigeria followed the same trend as that of the president. The male gender has dominated the leadership seat since the return of democracy in 1999.

Table 1 below shows the gender landscape of Nigeria’s federal legislature from 2015 to 2023 and highlights the extent of male domination of this national deliberative institution.

Table 1: Gender Landscape of 469-Seat National Assembly (2015-2023)

Year	No. of Seats occupied by women in the Senate	No. of Seats occupied by women in the House of Representatives	Total No. of Seats occupied by women	% of women in 469-National Assembly
2015	7	19	26	5.5%
2019	8	13	21	4.5%
2023	4	14	18	3.8%

Source: INEC,2015-2023

The outcome of the electoral race at the state level has not been different. Of the 10, 231 contestants to the State Houses of Assembly, only 1,019 (9.9%) were women of which only 48 won seats to the 991-Member State legislature. This indicates a success rate of a paltry 4.71% for female candidates at the state level. Besides the data revealing a 95.28% electoral loss at this level for women candidates, it also shows that there is only a negligible increase of seats in comparison with 2019. Women gained only seven seats more than the 41 won in 2019, to record a slight increment of 4.1 % to 4.7 %.

Table 2 below shows the gender landscape of Nigeria’s state legislature from 2015 to 2023 and also highlights the extent of male domination at the state level.

Table 2: Gender Landscape of 991 State Houses of Assembly (2015-2023)

State Houses of Assembly	No of Females	% Females
2015	55	5.5%
2019	41	4.1%
2023	48	4.7%

Source: INEC,2015-2023

As indicated in Table 3, the overall landscape in the state parliaments is similar to that which prevails at the national level, even though this legislature is generally regarded as being closer to the grassroots communities.

Mixed Results at State Level

Notwithstanding the deepening gender gap in the legislative arm of government, some history has also been recorded at the sub-national level which must be commended. For example, worthy of note is the fact that for the first time, the elections have produced a handful of women to the Houses of Assembly in the northern states of Kwara, Taraba and Kogi. Indeed, Kwara State in North-Central Nigeria has for the first time recorded 5 women in its 24-seat Assembly. This is the second highest number of women, after Ekiti State in South-West Nigeria which has 6 out of 26 members. Marginal increases also occurred in several states, for example, Ondo State rose from 1 to 3 female lawmakers; Kaduna and Plateau both rose from 1 to 2; and Edo and Nasarawa rose from zero to 1 each. Akwa Ibom rose from 2 to 4 female lawmakers; while others like Bayelsa and Delta have maintained their status quo of two female legislators each in the period 2019 and 2023.

States such as Imo, Gombe, Niger and Rivers which previously had a few elected female state legislators, are now left with none. Others like Cross River, Ebonyi, Enugu and Ogun saw a slight drop in their previous numbers. For example, Cross River went down from 4 women to 1; Ebonyi from 3 to 2 and Ogun from 4 women to 2 women. Table 4 below provides the data of women in the State Houses of Assembly for 2019 and 2023.

Table 3: Female Representation in State Houses of Assembly (2019-2023)

S/N	STATE	No of Seats	No of Females 2019	No of Females 2023
1	ABIA	24	0	0
2	ADAMAWA	25	1	1
3	AKWA IBOM	26	2	4
4	ANAMBRA	30	1	1
5	BAUCHI	31	0	0
6	BAYELSA	24	2	2
7	BENUE	30	1	2
8	BORNO	30	0	0
9	CROSS RIVER	25	4	1
10	DELTA	29	2	2
11	EBONYI	24	3	2
12	EDO	24	0	1
13	EKITI	26	4	6
14	ENUGU	24	3	2
15	GOMBE	24	1	0
16	IMO	27	2	0
17	JIGAWA	30	0	0
18	KADUNA	31	1	2
19	KANO	40	0	0
20	KATSINA	34	0	0
21	KEBBI	24	0	0
22	KOGI	25	0	2
23	KWARA	24	0	5
24	LAGOS	40	3	3
25	NASARAWA	24	0	1
26	NIGER	27	1	0
27	OGUN	26	4	2
28	ONDO	26	1	3
29	OSUN	26	2	0
30	OYO	32	1	2
31	PLATEAU	24	1	2
32	RIVERS	32	1	0
33	SOKOTO	30	0	0
34	TARABA	24	0	2
35	YOBE	24	0	0
36	ZAMFARA	24	0	0
	Total	991	41	48

Source: Dailytrust.com, 2023

- Note that the two elected female members of the Plateau State House of Assembly in the 2023 state elections were later sacked by the Appeal Court Judgment of 2023.

Of the thirty-six states, fifteen states have no female representation in their Houses of Assembly for the present legislative tenure. The states with zero female legislators in their Houses of Assembly are: Abia, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Imo, Jigawa, Kano, Kebbi, Katsina, Niger, Osun, Rivers, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara. Also, the out-gone tenure of 2019-2023, a similar number of states did not have female representation. They are: Abia, Bauchi, Borno, Edo, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe and Zamfara (Pogoso, 2023). Undoubtedly, there is a general decline in women's electoral fortunes from the perspective of representation. The total number of women in both legislatures in 2019 and 2023 underscores this fact. In 2019 for the joint federal and state legislatures of 1,460 seats, there were 62 women (4.3%); while in 2023, only 65 women sat in the federal and state legislatures (4.5%). The marginal wins and heavy losses at the ballot box show that much more needs to be done to address the hurdles encountered by female politicians.

In terms of female legislators, Nigeria lags behind on the continent. Rwanda has the highest proportion of seats held by women at 61.25%, which is also the highest figure in the world. In other parts of Africa, South Africa, Namibia and Uganda have 46%, 44% and 34% female legislators respectively. In West Africa, Senegal has the highest number of women in its national parliament at 42.4% of the seats. Guinea and Mali have 29.63% and 26.45% respectively. Republic of Niger has 26%, Benin Republic, 25%, Togo, 18.7% Ghana, 14.5%, Sierra Leone, 12.33%, Cote d'Ivoire, 12.5%, Liberia, 10.96%, Gambia 8.6% and Burkina Faso has 6.3%. Nigeria, the largest country in the sub-region has the lowest number of women in parliament at 3.2%. Nigerian female aspirants continue to take the back seat in political participation and representation. In the recently concluded 2023 general elections, female politicians performed poorly, even more poorly than in previous elections. Females make up about 49 per cent of Nigeria's population; and according to the voter register of the 2023 general elections by the Independent National Electoral Commission, of a total of 93,469,008 people who registered to vote, 44,414,846 or 47.5 per cent were females yet elections outcomes often tilt against female candidates.

1. Senate

Data from the election results show a sharp drop in the representation of females in the list of elected federal legislators. Only four females made it to the list of elected Senators in the 2023 election; this is the lowest when compared to the last two general elections. There were seven female senators in the 8th Assembly inaugurated in 2015, and six in the 9th Assembly inaugurated in 2019. After the 2023 general election in which 92 women contested for senatorial seats, the only 4 women who won and have been inaugurated into the 10th senate are the Labour Party's Ireti Kingibe from the FCT; Ipalibo Harry Banigo of the Peoples Democratic Party from Rivers West District, Idiat Adebule representing the All Progressives Congress and Lagos West District and Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan of PDP from Kogi Central Senatorial District.

Table 4: *Gender Distribution in the Nigerian Senate*

	Total Seats	Seats won by men	Seats won by women
2015	109	102	7
2019	109	103	6
2023	109	105	4

2. House of Representatives

In the House of Representatives election, females claimed only 15 out of the 360 seats in 2023. This is just a little higher than in 2019 when 13 women were elected into the House. Women occupied 19 House of Reps seats between 2015 and 2019.

Table 5: **Gender distribution in the Federal House of Representatives**

	Total Seats	Seats won by men	Seats won by women
2015	360	341	19
2019	360	347	13
2023	360	345	15

Source: INEC, 2015-2023

Nigeria ranks lowest in female representation in African national parliaments. Females have only 3.6% representation in Nigeria's federal parliament. Rwanda and South Africa top the chart with females making up 61% and 46% of their national parliaments respectively. Nigeria shares space with core patriarchal countries like Qatar, Iran, Vanuatu and Yemen where females constitute between 0-5% of national parliaments.

Governorship

Like in 2019, Nigeria also lost the chance to have the first female elected governor in 2023, as the candidate of the All Progressive Congress in Adamawa State, Aishatu Dahiru Ahmed, only

came close to winning the governorship election in the state. Nigerian women seem to be content with being Deputy Governors; even though they are outnumbered by men in this position too. Out of a hundred women who contested the positions of deputy governors in 28 states, only seven won in the following states: Ebonyi, Plateau, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Ogun, Kaduna, Ekiti, and Adamawa. Albeit still low, this number is higher when compared to 2015 and 2019, when 6 and 4 women were elected respectively.

Table 6: Gender distribution of Deputy Governors in the last three elections

Year	Total No. of Seats	Male DGs	Female DGs
2015	36	30	6
2019	36	32	4
2023	36	28	8

Source: INEC,2015-2023

State Assemblies

In 2023 elections, out of 990 positions of the State Assemblies, only 60 were won by women, in the 2019 election, out of 990 State Houses of Assembly seats across the 36 states, females won only 48 seats out of 1,046 state legislative seats showing a 4.59 % success rate. Meanwhile, these 48 lawmakers were elected in only 21 states. The remaining 15 states elected only one female lawmaker into their respective Houses of Assembly in the last election. In 2015 and 2019, the figures were 60 and 40 respectively.

Table 7: Gender distribution in State Houses of Assembly

	Total Seats	Seats won by men	Seats won by women
2015	990	930	60
2019	990	950	40
2023	990	942	48

INEC, 2015-2023

In total, 1,550 women contested various elective positions in 2023, but only 72 women were successful. Women have not succeeded in reaching 10 per cent representation in government since the beginning of the current democratic run in 1999. Women remain underrepresented in politics and governance in our country despite efforts, through protests and policy proposals, by gender advocates and Civil Society Organisations to change the narrative.

Table 8: Plateau State House of Assembly

Date	Total number	Male	%	Female	%
2015	24	22	92	2	8
2019	24	23	96	1	4
2023	24	24	100	0	0

Source: Plateau State Independent Electoral Commission (PLASIEC)

Table 8 shows that in 2015, the number of women elected into the Plateau State House of Assembly was 2 out of 24 members representing 8%. In 2019, only one woman was elected into the Plateau State House of Assembly representing 4%. In the 2023 elections, two women were elected into the Plateau State House of Assembly, representing 8% but were however removed by the Appeal Court Judgment in 2023, leaving the legislative without a female representation.

Furthermore, the results of 2024 general elections into the 17 local government councils shows that the 17 chairmanship positions were all won by men, deputy chairmen has 13 men and 4 women and out of 340 councillorship seats, only 12 were won by women representing 3.5%. This shows a very low level of women participation in politics in Plateau State (PLASIEC, 2025)

CONCLUSION

Since 1999, when Nigeria returned to a democratic system of governance after years of military dictatorship, there has been a low level of women participation in politics. Despite the various institutional frameworks put in place such as the 1999 Constitution (as amended), international treaties, conventions and protocols and the National Gender policies, among others, women political participation in Nigeria and Plateau State in particular have remained low with political representation of women in government in the state still below 10% even after the 2023 elections. In Plateau State, inspite of the establishment of the Gender and Equal Opportunities Commission of 2015, women political participation has not improved beyond voting and campaign activities. This is evident in the fact that only one woman was elected into the Plateau State 24-member Assembly in 2019 and two women in 2023 who have been removed by the Appeal Court Judgment of 2023. Even in the Local Government elections of 2024, only 12 female Councilors emerged out of 340. These figures revealed gross under-representation of women in governance and decision-making positions where laws, policies and key decisions are made for the good governance of the State.

From the findings of this study, it is evident that women political empowerment and participation in politics are very low in Plateau State largely due to the poor implementation and adherence to legal frameworks and policies formulated to foster women political empowerment for effective political participation. It is therefore concluded in this research that women political empowerment is a pre-requisite for their effective participation in politics. Hence the need to ensure that the frameworks and policies formulated to promote women political empowerment are implemented and adhered to through executive and legislative actions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were proffered

1. The 30% Affirmative Action quota reservation for women in appointive and electoral positions as assented to at 1995 Beijing Conference by Nigeria and 35% by the National Gender Policy of 2022 should be included in the Nigerian Constitution, domesticated and implementation by Plateau State through the Gender and Equal Opportunities Commission.
2. The Nigerian government through the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should make it mandatory for political parties to also include and implement the 35% Affirmative Action in their party constitutions. This will impact on the structure and functions of the political parties across the states, including Plateau State.
3. That the Plateau State government through the Gender and Equal Opportunities Commission should make and implement a policy on Equal Gender Leadership at the Local Government Councils that will empower women politically. This will ensure that every candidate for Chairmanship position chooses another gender as a running mate. This will empower women to participate in politics and contribute meaningfully to the development of the State.
4. The government of Plateau State should appoint Gender Desk Officers for all the government offices, Boards, Parastatals and the Local Government Councils. These officers shall be supervised by the Gender and Equal Opportunities Commission. Among the mandates of the officers shall include the gradual inclusion of women in decision making through internal appointments into decision making positions in Standing and Ad-hoc committees, among others.

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