

# **MEN WITHOUT WOMEN: AN ANALYSIS OF THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

*Women do not often receive the support and mentoring they need to compete with their male counterparts in politics. Even voters do not fully appreciate the benefits of having a mix of men and women in government, often saying that women are over-ambitious when they aspire for any political position. As a result, there is currently a low representation of women at all levels of government in Nigeria. In the 2011 general election, female candidates fared poorly, with only 32 women elected to the national parliament out of 469 members, which is barely 8% representation. This paper examines the level of women participation in the just concluded 2015 general elections. It argues that women's political involvement in that election was very low in spite of decades of struggle for gender equity and women's empowerment. The paper equally identifies and discusses the problems face by women in their quest to participate in politics, examine the theoretical perspective of the discrimination and inequality suffered by women; and lastly suggest possible measures that could aid their political participation and empowerment.*

## **Introduction**

The 2015 general elections has just come and gone but the memories of the elections have continued to linger in the minds of many. For some, the elections brought fulfilled dreams as they were declared winners in the various contest while others have already geared up for litigation in the various election petition tribunals for losing the contest. However, the greatest losers are women who recorded an all time low participation in the 2015 elections compared to the previous ones. The men seem to have completely forgotten about women in that election venturing into the process without their feasible presence. In fact with the results of the just concluded elections, it seems women's low participation in elective positions have grown from bad to worse. There is growing concern amongst women that the percentage of their participation in elective positions in the country witnessed decline or nose-dived from 2007 to 2011 and now 2015 (Gabriel, 2015:4).

Women have contested for different positions in the four elections held by the country since its return to democratic rule in 1999 but have recorded poor results, minimal gains and slow progress. For instance in 2002, women made up only three percent of elected officials, in 2007 they made up seven percent and in 2011 they made up about five percent and even before the 2015 general elections few women emerged as candidates after the political party primaries. In the 29 states where gubernatorial elections held this year, the representation of women seeking the office of governor and deputy governor was 87 out of the 380 candidates (22.9 per cent) running for the positions. In the contest for senatorial seats, 122 women out of 747 candidates, representing 16 per cent, were cleared by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to run in the March 28 election. The number was not better in the contest for the lower chamber of parliament. Two hundred and sixty seven (267) women out of a total 1774 candidates ran for seats at the House of Representatives, representing 15 per cent (Gabriel, 2015:4).

In fact, according to the Deputy Director Gender Division of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Mrs. Blessing Obidiegwu, 14 females were elected into the House of Representatives and eight women won as senators in the just concluded National Assembly election. What this means is that there are only 14 females out of 360 lawmakers for this current House of Representatives. The outgoing seventh assembly had 27 women and only eight of them were re-elected for the 8<sup>th</sup> assembly. Similarly, the 8th Senate has eight women out of 109 senators. Again, out of the 14 candidates that contested for the seat of the president, the only woman amongst the contenders came out in the 12th position (Akor, 2015:8).

Just as men have always dominated the National Assembly since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999, the 2015 election result does not present a different picture in the number of women representation in the next four years. The gubernatorial elections have so far produced four women deputy governors. Equally, the only viable female gubernatorial candidate, Senator Aisha Jummai Al-Hassan lost the election in Taraba state after a spirited fight which raised and dashed the hope of women that at least history will be made with the election of the first female executive governor of a state. Her counterpart in Akwa Ibom State, Senator Helen Esuene of the Labour Party did not fare better as she made no meaningful impact in the all male dominated election (Gabriel, 2015:4).

According to Barrister Ebere Ifendu, Chair Women in Politics Forum (WiP), women did not do well in the elections ‘not because they didn’t come out to participate but because the system is not still smooth enough for them’. In her words:

“Looking at what is going on in Taraba and Akwa Ibom where women contested, there was so much violence and unfortunately we are not going to have as much women as the previous senate. We are not happy with it but we have to re-strategize and see what we can do to have more women participate. Because as it is, we are just back to square one. Until there is legislation on the 35 percent affirmative action women will continue to have problems because election is very much monetized, women don’t have resources to match men. There is no genuine internal democracy in the political parties and candidates are handpicked, adding that when one scales party primary he or she has scaled the most hurdle” (Akor, 2015:8).

Furthermore, she observed that because there is no internal democracy in political parties, women were not able to come out as candidates. Secondly, because of the tokenism of the free forms that the political parties give women, when it comes to consensus, it is the woman that is often asked to step down. “They will rather consider someone who paid for forms, in that they will scheme us out again. It is like giving you something with the right hand and taking it back with the left hand” she observed. However as bad as the above situation seems, this current figures of women participation tend to be an improvement on the previous era as more governments are consciously making efforts to choose women as deputy governors and there is an increase in their membership at both States and National Assemblies compared to the figures in 1999 when there were only 3 female senators out of 109 members, 12 out of 360 in the House of Representatives, 15 State Assembly members spread across the 36 states in the country and only 1 female deputy governor in all the 36 states (Akor, 2015:8).

The above paints a vivid picture of the plight of women in the just concluded 2015 general elections and propels our interest to set to work to examine and analyze the performance of women in that election. We begin with the analysis of some conceptual and theoretical issues on women participation in politics, highlight the impediments to their participation and as well recommend measures that can boost women participation and empowerment.

## **Conceptual and Theoretical Issues**

Issues concerning women empowerment, equality and their participation in politics are no longer new to scholarly discussions and in academia because since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century such considerations have assumed universal dimension. Scholarly works are replete of theoretical and empirical discussions of women inequality and second-class status in politics and the workplace (Adeleke, 2010; Muo and Dada, 2008; Nagray, 2006; Manley, 2006; Osunyikanmi, 2006; Aruna, 2005; Agara, 2001; Adedimeji, 1998; Weidemann and Merabet, 1992; Buttner and Rosen, 1985; Makinde et al, 1994). These are just to mention a few.

The literature seems to be inundated with variety of reasons that accounts for women subjugation in societies they (women) are numerically dominant. The kaleidoscope commentary on low women's involvement in the Nigerian politics hinges it on issues of marginalization, male domination, cultural practices, abuse of religion, poverty, economic and social instability (see Folalo and Fwatshak 2008; Shvedova 2008; Arowolo and Aluko 2010; Agbalajobi 2010). For emphasis, participation in the opinion of Luka (2011) entails involvement of citizens in some way with making decisions in political system. Roberts and Edwards (1991) described participation as a term which is usually applied to voluntary rather than coerced activities. They proceeded to explain the term by saying that when participation is used in political context it is "the voluntary activities of an individual in political affairs including inter alia: voting as one of the tenets of democracy, is found to be liberal and unrestrictive (cited in Luka 2011).

Indeed, Izugbara and Onuoha (2003) and Ezeigbo, (1996) have explained how oral traditions, surviving religious cults, relics and indigenous political cultures in different parts of Nigeria support the view that women are major players in the political system in the past. For Ezeigbo (1996), women's active role in politics during the colonial era, significantly contributed to making the Nigerian nation (cited in Tashi 1999:95). Issues of cultural and traditional practices seem to have severe implication on the ability, willingness and the involvement of women in socio-political cum administrative endeavours. According to the African leadership Forum, several traditional practices are injurious to women's self esteem and self image which are necessary ingredients for the confidence needed in political participation (cited in Yetunde, 2008:331). The issues of marriage institutions especially the polygamous set up, widowhood, child marriage, female circumcision, exorbitant bride price and rejection of wives by husbands

because they could not have children are all identified setbacks that prevent the women from active political responsibilities (Yetunde, 2008:331).

There seems to be a consensus opinion that Nigerian women constitute about half of the population of the country and thus should play a vital role in the society. Agbalajobi (2010:1) examining women's participation and the political process in Nigeria, found out that despite the major roles they play and their population, the society has not given recognition to these and to the fact that they are discriminated against. This is due to some cultural stereotype, abuse of religion, traditional practices and patriarchal societal structures. He further explained that Nigerian women have therefore over the years become target of violence of diverse form based on their positions in promoting transformative politics. In this direction Adeniyi (2003:353) identified violence and other forms of electoral conflicts perpetrated and perpetuated by men and male youths as the major barriers confronting and inhibiting women active participation in Nigerian politics. For Enemu (2008:232) women are regularly exposed to various forms of physical, psychological, sexual and emotional violence.

Similarly, the shaping influence of gender on the formation of identity and on the structuring of inequalities has been a subject of debate among social theorists. For instance according to scholars who are favourable to the socio-biological theory, the biological differences between men and women are sufficient explanation for the basic sexual division of labour in society. Tiger and Fox (1972:87) have argued that people are disposed to behave in certain ways by a genetically based program called the "socio-biogrammar." This biogrammar programs men for politics and hence the tendency of taking all key political and economic positions in society. On the other hand, this biogrammar assigns to women only reproductive and domestic responsibilities.

But Murdock (1949:106) is of the opinion that biological differences such as greater physical strength and musculature and the fact that women bear children, tend to lead to gender roles out of sheer practicality. Given this fact therefore, a sexual division of labour becomes the most natural and efficient way of organizing society. Extending his theory of functional imperatives to the study of the family, Parsons (1960:69) has attributed the function of socialization of the young and the stabilization of the adult personality to the woman. According to him, a woman fulfils an 'expressive' role within the family as she provides warmth, security and emotional support, which are essential for the effective socialization of the young. A man, on

the other hand, has an ‘instrumental’ role which sees him competing in what Parsons’ has called an “achievement oriented society.” The social and perhaps natural division is that the man thus relies on the woman to relieve his tension and anxiety through the provisions of love, consideration and understanding.

Deconstructing the conservative and doctrinaire ideologies and explanations of the sociobiologists, the gender-stratification perspective has ruled that gender inequality is a reflection of the structure of society. Emerging in the 1980s, the gender-stratification theories focused on the process by which people are categorized as male and female and are consequently evaluated and rewarded unequally. Gender stratification therefore highlights the structural basis of women’s subordination to men, or the relatively stable and predictable behaviour and institutional patterns that place women in a disadvantaged position (Taylor et al, 1993:60). This perspective contends that women’s unpaid maintenance work in the home and reproductive work (bearing and rearing children) is largely influential in determining their lower status.

Given all these, what today can be termed as constituting theoretical postulations about women has emerged from two separate political movements. The first was the Women rights movement which emerged in the early 1960s. This movement was composed mainly of professional women who began to put pressure on federal and state institutions in America to end discrimination that women experienced in entering the paid labour market. This movement also garnered support from many middle class housewives who were dissatisfied with their lot as housewives. The second movement was the popular Women’s Liberation Movement which emerged out of the New Left in the latter part of the 1960s. It is actually from this movement that most of the theoretical works have emerged. Two major theoretical constructions can be discerned from this movement (Smith, 1992:43).

The first is Feminist Historical Materialism which argued that traditional Marxist theories had interpreted the idea of productive activity rather too narrowly by focusing on those activities traditionally associated with men than women. Thus, Marxist Feminism argues that production needed to be understood as including not only work geared towards the creation of food and objects but also work geared at the creation and care of human beings. The set of theories that have been expounded under this banner are all geared towards developing a theory that explained the origins of women’s oppression and the means by which this oppression has been sustained over time. The second theoretical postulation and framework emerged from the political

limitation noted by radical and socialist feminists and associated with the liberal feminists' 'women and men are the same' perspective. They view such positions as advocating for the acceptance of women as men but in an otherwise unaltered social world. For this group of radical feminists such a politics that merely strove to placing women where men had previously been lacked ambition. Rather they opted to elaborate on the differences between women and men in terms of the unique situation and characteristics of women (Smith, 1992:43).

However, both theoretical postulations do not constitute an end to theorizing about the origins of women disempowerment and subjugation but has instead opened up room for more theories either as an attempt of a critique of the existing ones or a variant of it. For instance, Adebowale (2012:238) in looking at women's attitude towards their socio-economic and political empowerment debunked the argument that women do not like to be empowered or that only the educated supports women empowerment. He rather argues that many women desire empowerment but do not appreciate the labour that attends such empowerment; enduring the tortuous path to empowerment is a daunting challenge for them. Thus, Agbalajobi (2010:77) contended that women's aspiration to participate in governance is premised on the following ground; first, that women in Nigeria represent half of the population and hence should be allowed a fair share in decision-making and the governance of the country. Secondly, base on natural justice and the fact that all human beings are equal and women possess the same rights as men to participate in governance and public life, the right to democratic governance is an entitlement conferred upon all citizens by law. The right to democratic governance seems to have brought to the fore many other areas of concern. Especially in the 21st century that witnessed the emergence of the issue of gender mainstreaming. Presently, the challenges of the new millennium compel everyone to be concerned about the many women who have been deprived, marginalized and discriminated against over the years, and as a result of which many have not been able to participate actively and effectively in the political terrain, which in effect leads to social injustice (Akande, 2006:167).

Arguably, the present empowerment agenda seems incapable of addressing the ever increasing challenges confronting women folk. It is important to note that the provision of conducive environment capable of reawakening women's consciousness to contribute meaningfully and compete favourably to the social, political and economic development may not be realized through empowerment alone. Some practices in politics need to be discarded. For

instance, political attitude of demonizing hours of political meetings would only compound women's wrong perceptions of politics and as well offers more leverage for male domination. Again, it is assumed that women must seek permission from their husband to participate. Also disturbing is the antics of most successful women who appear to be proponent of unjust practices against women. The implication is that it nurtures hatred among women especially the ordinary women on the street, disconnect them from being supportive and places men as preferable alternative. In fact, this disunity has remained a barrier (Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2012:3).

However, Luka (2011:30) explained that the underrepresentation of women on the political scene can be reversed by empowering them economically, indeed; increasing the income of women gives them self confidence. According to him:

the link between economic empowerment and quality of lives of women come to the fore as women tend to become more vocal when empowered in making decision on the number of kids they want to have, quality of education for their children, matters of hygiene and the environment to mention a few. Women are also better stewards of economic capital as research has shown that they are more likely than men to plough profit of economic activities into human capital development of children and they are more likely to educate daughters. The implication of this is that more educated women are better suited to participate in decision making process in the society. Women who are empowered economically have less difficulty in playing active roles in politics as they can assert themselves and are unlikely to become pawns in hands of political godfathers with sinister ends in sight (Luka, 2011:30).

Finally, it is important to note that for women to achieve their political interest, the women need to develop a platform that will serve as a strong interest group that is capable of influencing government policies in their favour and resist the temptation of being boxed into one position. There is no gainsaying the fact that women empowerment campaigners have engaged issues that border on cultural, economic, social and political subjugation over the years without much progress. As a result, there is need for a paradigm shift; individualism would be jettisoned for collectivism. Specification of office for the women should be de-emphasized to enable wider aspirations. Women should form a common front and fight as one. It is within this context that women could achieve much needed socio-economic and political equity.

### **Women and the 2015 General Elections**

The gubernatorial candidate of the All Progressives Congress, APC, in Taraba State Aisha Jumai Alhassan would have made history in the last gubernatorial election in the state as the first



woman to scale the hurdles of electioneering campaign and break the jinx that has befuddled Nigerian women over the years from emerging successful at the polls as governors. Mama Taraba as she was fondly called almost made it but then, the near-success syndrome that has been the lot of many Nigerian women in politics cut short her joy. Before the elemental forces played tricks on her, expectations were high that she would emerge successful considering the bent of results that was reeled out by the Independent Electoral Commission, INEC. But suddenly, the elements beat a retreat that first led to the results of the election being declared inconclusive and then, a re-run that finally dashed her hopes as she finally lost the race to the People's Democratic Party's candidate, Darius Dickson Ishaku (Gabriel, 2015:4). Nigerian women would have recorded a rare feat in elective politics had she succeeded in emerging the first elected female governor in Nigeria.

The above seems to have been the high point of the 2015 electoral contest and the bane of women participation in politics in the country. The expectations prior to the elections were that women were likely going to do better than what had been obtainable since the advent of civil rule in 1999 as there were some recorded improvements in the number of women that occupied elective positions with successive elections. For instance, the proportion of seats held by women in the National Parliament increased from 3.1 per cent in 2000 to 7.5 per cent in 2008. After the 10 May 2007 elections, data from the National Centre for Women Development showed that there were 9 female senators, compared to 4 in 2003. Also, there were 26 female members in the House of Representatives, compared to 23 in 2003. Between 2006 and 2009, 2 women were appointed to the Supreme Court bench, while female Deputy Governors increased from 2 in 2003 to 6 in 2007 (Nesbitt-Ahmed, 2011:2). Similarly, in 2011 the number of female senators dropped by one with 8 adorning the red chamber while the house recorded a reduction in the number of female representatives from 26 to 24. This revealed that female candidates fared poorly, with only 32 women elected to the national parliament out of 469 members, which is barely 8% representation. However, these losses were however compensated by the appointment of 13 women out of 41 ministers by the Johnathan administration in pursuant of its avowed commitment to the 35% affirmative action for women representation (Nesbitt-Ahmed, 2011:2).

In Nigeria's 2011 presidential election, Sarah Jubril was the only female amongst the three presidential candidates for the 2011 Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) presidential election primary; the other two were President Goodluck Jonathan and former Vice President Atiku

Abubakar. While her single vote cast reaffirms the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian political system, what was even more interesting was the discourse surrounding the only female presidential candidate. One in particular stood out, with the writer asking ‘Just why does Sarah Jubril bother?’:

Nigeria is a male-dominated, chauvinistic country stifled by culture, tradition and social rankings that make the Indian caste system look feeble. There is simply no place in Nigeria today for a woman to head a country of 150m including men who often see women as second-class citizens or simple objects of desire. Today, Nigeria is a man’s country. Live with it. For all her determination and forthrightness, Sarah Jubril has the *audacity* to hope that the major political parties, all headed by men, would willfully sign up to the prospects of a female president (Nesbitt-Ahmed, 2011:2).

Speaking on the process leading to the 2015 general elections, Gender Advisor, Search for Common Ground Nigeria, Ene Ede said noticeable retrogressions were identified not only in the number of female candidates who contested March 28th and April 11 Presidential, National Assembly, Governorship and State House of Assembly elections; but in the focus on gender as well. According to her, “the 2007 and 2011 had better focus on processes, issues and candidacy as it concerns women and other marginalized and excluded groups .Only one female presidential candidate contested the 2015 elections; four female vice-presidential candidates, one main governorship contender and five deputy governorships; and 15 percent of 1,774 House of Representatives and 17 percent of 747 Senate seats”. For her, a major constraint was the processes leading to the selection and nominations to various offices adding that the election crisis resolution, mediation platforms and structures were gender insensitive (Akor, 2015:1).

In the current senate, only eight out of the 109 senators are women. Three of the eight female-senators are of the All Progressive Congress (APC). They are Oluremi Tinubu, who is a ranking member of the Red Chamber from the Lagos Central Senatorial District; the former Speaker of the Oyo State House of Assembly, Alhaja Monsurat Sunmonu; and Binta Masi Garba from Adamawa North. The five other women are from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). They will be joining the Upper Chamber of the National Assembly afresh. Anambra and Ekiti States produced two each and the other is from Cross River State. From Anambra are: House of Representatives member Uche Ekwunife (Central) and the former Aviation Minister Stella Oduah (North). The two elected Senators from Ekiti are Abiodun Olujimi (South), who

was Governor Ayodele Fayose's deputy from 2003 to October 16, 2006, when they were impeached by 24 of the 26-members of the House of Assembly, and Fatima Raji-Rasaki (Central), a House of Representatives member between 2003 and 2007. Fatima is the wife of the former military administrator of Oyo and Lagos States, Brig-Gen. Raji Rasaki (rtd). The fifth female PDP Senator is Rose Okoh, representing Cross River (North) (Uzoanya and Awodipe, 2015:8).

In the House of Representatives, the situation was not much different, though the return rate was not as dismal as that recorded in the Senate. A total of 14 women were elected on the platform of the APC and PDP. These include Nnenna Elendu-Ukeje, PDP (Bende); Nkiruka Chidubem Onyejeocha, PDP (Isuikwuato/Umunneochi); Barr (Mrs) Rita Orji, PDP, (Ajeromi-Ifelodun); Eucharia Azodo Okwunna, PDP, (Aguata); Asabe Vilita Bashir, APC, (Gwoza/Dambo a/Chibok); Evelyn Omavovoan Oboro, PDP, (Uvwie/Okpe/Sapele); and Omosede Igbinedion Gabriella, PDP, (Ovia North East/Ovia South West); Stella Ngwu, PDP, (Uzo-Uwani, Igbo Etiti); Fatima Binta Bello, PDP, (Kaltungo/Shon); Aishatu Jibril Dukku, APC, (Dukku/Nafada); and Olufunke Adedoyin, APC, (Ekiti/Irepodun/Isin/Oke Ero); Ayo Hulayat Omidiran, APC, (Aye daade/Irewole/Isokan); Khadija Buka A. Ibrahim, APC, (Gulani/Gujbadamatru/Tarmuwa), Sodaguno A. Festus Omoni, PDP, (Ogbia). On the other hand, the gubernatorial elections have so far produced four female deputy governors. They are Oluranti Adebule (Lagos State), Mrs. Yetunde Onanuga (Ogun State), Ipalibo Banigo (Rivers State), and Cecilia Ezeilo (Enugu State) (Uzoanya and Awodipe, 2015:8).

In the 8th Senate, only Senator Oluremi Tinubu, from Lagos State secured a return to the Red Chamber. Senator Nkechi Nwaogu from Abia State, after 12 years in the National Assembly; one four-year term in the House of Representatives and another eight-year term in the Senate, did not make it back to the legislature. Senators Helen Esuene from Akwa Ibom State, Margery Okadigbo from Anambra, Chris Anyanwu from Imo, Nenadi Usman from Kaduna and Zaynab Kure from Niger also failed to get tickets to return to the Senate. However, Helen Esuene took the labour party gubernatorial ticket for Akwa Ibom State just like her counterpart in Taraba State who became the APC flag bearer for the governorship election in that state (Tsan, 2015:4).

It is pertinent to note that the southern part of the country produced more female legislators than the northern part. In the South East for instance, two out of the three senators from Anambra State are female. They are former minister of Aviation, Stella Oduah and a

former member of the House, who chaired the House Committee on Environment, Hon Uche Ekwunife. In Cross River, a former member of the House of Representatives, Hon Rose Oko, got elected to the Senate. In the North East, precisely Adamawa State, former member of the House of Representatives, Binta Masi Garba, won election to the 8th Senate. In the South West, the number one female figure in the legislature, majority leader of the House, Hon Mulikat Akande-Adeola, from Oyo State, failed to secure enough votes to return her to the green chamber. Same goes for Hon Stella Dorgu who was aiming for the Senate in Bayelsa and former ambassador, Nkoyo Toyo, who failed to secure a ticket at the primaries. In all of it, only 8 out of the total of 119 female candidates cleared by INEC were able to scale the hurdle to the Senate in 2015. Similarly, 14 women out of a total of 256 female candidates cleared for the House of Representatives elections got elected into the green chamber (Tsan, 2015:4).

Although we could not confirm from INEC the total number of women elected into the various Houses of Assembly in all the states of the federation, records of the number of female candidates cleared by the electoral body reveals that a total number 755 female candidates were cleared to contest the 2015 general elections into the various Houses of Assembly across all the political parties in the entire country. On a state by state basis, Enugu State had the highest number of 67 female candidates followed by Anambra with 65 candidates while Yobe and Katsina States recorded an all time low of 1 candidate each (see table 1 below). On the basis of the six geo-political zones, the South West had the highest number of 252 female House of Assembly candidates followed by the South East with 203, and North Central with 108, South-South 96 while the North West and North East geo-political zones had 57 and 39 female candidates cleared to contest the elections (see table 2).

However, when compared to the number of male candidates cleared for the same election, these numbers of female candidates pale into insignificance as a total of 4520 male candidates emerged against 755 females nationwide for the house of assembly elections. The highest number of male candidates for that election came from Oyo State with 234, followed by Kano with 220 and Imo with 218 candidates. It is surprising that Oyo state with that number of male candidates had only 28 females and thus had the highest differentials between male and female of minus 206. Similarly, Kano with 220 male candidates had only 19 females with a difference of minus 201, followed by Imo State with minus 188, Sokoto with minus 169 and Katsina with

minus 162. Of all, Enugu and Osun with a fair number of both female and male candidates recorded the lowest differentials of minus 31 and 45 respectively (see table 3).

Table 1: Distribution of the total number of female candidates cleared by INEC to contest the 2015 House of Assembly elections according to the thirty-six (36) states of the federation

S/NO	STATE	NO. OF CANDIDATES
1.	ABIA	27
2.	ADAMAWA	10
3.	AKWA – IBOM	9
4.	ANAMBRA	65
5.	BAUCHI	4
6.	BAYELSA	9
7.	BENUE	11
8.	BORNO	2
9.	CROSS RIVER	10
10.	DELTA	37
11.	EBONYI	14
12.	EDO	13
13.	EKITI	37
14.	ENUGU	67
15.	GOMBE	7
16.	IMO	30
17.	JIGAWA	3
18.	KADUNA	8
19.	KANO	19
20.	KATSINA	1
21.	KEBBI	18
22.	KOGI	22
23.	KWARA	32
24.	LAGOS	43
25.	NASSARAWA	2

26.	NIGER	13
27.	OGUN	42
28.	ONDO	30
29.	OSUN	72
30.	OYO	28
31.	PLATEAU	28
32.	RIVERS	18
33.	SOKOTO	3
34.	TARABA	15
35.	YOBE	1
36.	ZAMFARA	5
	Total no. of candidates	755

Source: Compiled by author with data collected from INEC web site..

Table 2: Distribution of the total number of female candidates cleared by INEC to contest the 2015 House of Assembly elections according to the six (6) Geo-political zones.

S/NO	NAME OF ZONE	TOTAL NO. OF CANDIDATES
1.	SOUTH – EAST	203
2.	SOUTH – WEST	252
3.	SOUTH – SOUTH	96
4.	NORTH – CENTRAL	108
5.	NORTH – WEST	57
6.	NORTH – EAST	39
	Total no. of candidates	755

Source: Compiled by author with data collected from INEC web site..

Table 3: Distribution of the total number of female candidates cleared by INEC to contest the 2015 House of Assembly elections against the number of male candidates according to the thirty-six states of the federation.

S/NO	STATE	NO. OF FEMALE CANDIDATES	NO. OF MALE CANDIDATES	DIFFERENCE
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1.	ABIA	27	126	-99
2.	ADAMAWA	10	152	-142
3.	AKWA – IBOM	9	110	-101
4.	ANAMBRA	65	180	-115
5.	BAUCHI	7	111	-104
6.	BAYELSA	9	135	-126
7.	BENUE	11	80	-69
8.	BORNO	2	112	-110
9.	CROSS RIVER	10	62	-52
10.	DELTA	37	158	-121
11.	EBONYI	14	91	-77
12.	EDO	13	97	-84
13.	EKITI	37	95	-58
14.	ENUGU	67	98	-31
15.	GOMBE	7	94	-87
16.	IMO	30	218	-188
17.	JIGAWA	3	83	-80
18.	KADUNA	8	108	-100
19.	KANO	19	220	-201
20.	KATSINA	1	163	-162
21.	KEBBI	18	91	-73
22.	KOGI	22	93	-71
23.	KWARA	32	99	-67
24.	LAGOS	43	178	-135
25.	NASSARAWA	2	123	-121
26.	NIGER	13	103	-90
27.	OGUN	42	157	-115
28.	ONDO	30	141	-111
29.	OSUN	72	117	-45
30.	OYO	28	234	-206

31.	PLATEAU	28	62	-34
32.	RIVERS	18	149	-131
33.	SOKOTO	3	172	-169
34.	TARABA	15	95	-24
35.	YOBE	1	68	-67
36.	ZAMFARA	5	145	-140
		755	4520	

Source: Compiled by author with data collected from INEC web site..

From the above tables, a total of 755 women got clearance from INEC to contest the House of Assembly election in the various states of the federation against a total of 4520 male candidates. This translated to about 14.31% of the total number of female candidates for the house of assembly election while the male candidates accounted for 85.68% of the total. For the Senate and House of Representatives, the contention is no longer on the number of candidates since the figures that won the elections are already in the public domain. The Nigerian women have only additionally been blessed with four (4) deputy governors who will support the governors in their various states. This number still remains low as the expectations were that the rate of women participation in the 2015 elections should surpass the record of 2011. As it stands, the difference between the numbers of women in both elections will certainly be insignificant. This development also put the issue of women participation in politics, gender equality and the pursuit of 35% affirmative action in reverse in spite of the concerted efforts by women activists and groups, civil society as well as other stakeholders in drumming support for gender parity.

According to Deji Oladoye (2012), it was confirmed that women constituted 9.1% of the total number of candidates which contested the April 2011 polls, leaving 90.9% as male candidates across political parties. The analysis showed the figure of women contesting for the President, Vice President, Governor, Deputy Governor, National Assembly and State houses. The implication of this was that very few women passed through the primaries to make the candidates list, thus, reinforcing the demand that the conditions for party primaries should be investigated to support the need for a more level playing field. However, if this figure and percentage of women participation in 2011 was low, then that of 2015 can be said to be abysmal with less than a thousand women contesting for the position of President, Governors, Deputy Governors, National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly.



In the 29 states where gubernatorial elections held this year, the representation of women seeking the office of governor and deputy governor was 87 out of the 380 candidates (22.9 per cent) running for the positions. In the contest for senatorial seats, 122 women out of 747 candidates, representing 16 per cent, were cleared by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to run in the March 28 election. The number was not better in the contest for the lower chamber of parliament. Two hundred and sixty seven women out of a total 1774 candidates contested for seats at the House of Representatives, representing 15 per cent. Speaking at a conference organized by The Nigerian Women Trust Fund, and supported by the Department for International Development (DFID) and Voices4Change, Ayisha Osori, the chief executive officer of the fund, painted the picture even more vividly. Miss Osori was one of four panelists at the conference themed, “2014 Primaries: What The Numbers Tell Us,” which sought to “analyze the performance of women in the 2014 party primaries with an eye on the 2015 general elections and what this entails for women’s political participation in Nigeria” (Tsan, 2015:4).

In her analysis, she indicated that the North Central geo-political zone had 43 and 20 women who emerged after the primaries to contest for seats in the House of Representatives and Senate respectively. The North East, which had the lowest number of women candidates from the geographical zones, fielded 16 women for the House of Representatives and eight for Senate, while the North West had 24 women for the House of Representatives and nine for the Senate. The South East, with the highest number of female candidates, had 84 for the House of Representatives and 29 for Senate. The South West had 66 women contesting for seats in the House of Representative and 34 for the Senate, while the South-South had 36 for the House of Representatives and 21 for the Senate (Tsan, 2015:4).

While analyzing by political parties, Miss Osori said the Mega Progressive Peoples Party had the highest number of women vying for seats, with 30 women contesting for the House of Representatives and 16 for Senate. Labour Party had the least numbers; 15 for House of Representatives and seven for Senate. The Peoples Democratic Party had 19 women for the House of Representatives and seven for Senate, while the All Progressives Congress had 26 women for the House of Representatives and seven for the Senate. In all of these, Enugu State had 34 women contesting for seats in the National Assembly, the highest of all the states. Edo, Katsina, Taraba and Kano States, on the other hand, had the lowest numbers with one woman

from each state. Miss Osori summarizes the concern of many gender advocates thus: “At the end of the day if we have only an average of 15 per cent (National Assembly) contesting, then we are sure to fall below 35 per cent.” (Tsan, 2015:4).

Nigerian women have not had it smooth in terms of representation in top public offices. In the just dissolved 7<sup>th</sup> Senate, none of the principal officers was a woman, and only eight of the 109 senators were women. The House of Representatives had only one female principal officer. However, only 24 (7 per cent) of the 362 members were women. These figures are in contrast with the situation in countries such as Rwanda, where women make up 61 of 106 parliamentarians (58 per cent), and Senegal where women occupy 65 of the 150 parliamentary seats (43 per cent). In Nigeria’s 36 states, there is no female governor, and the country does not appear ready to have a woman as president, although a woman ran for that office this year. All of these realities exist despite the National Gender Policy’s promise to support women to occupy 35 per cent of elective positions in Nigeria. Development experts and gender activists have continuously advocated for the active participation of women in governance for the good of society. The result of the just concluded 2015 elections in the country has however, not shown improved women representation in elective positions in the country (Tsan, 2015:4).

Out of the 14 candidates that contested for the seat of the president, the only woman amongst the contenders Remi Sonaiya of KOWA Party came out in the 12th position. Just as men have always dominated the National Assembly, the 2015 election result does not present a different picture in the number of women who will represent their constituencies in the next four years. Over the years, Nigerian women have continued to record very poor performances in elective political offices. This is largely due to the sentimental attachment on feminine gender. Although they have been playing crucial role in political life of the country, this has not yielded results in terms of their performances when it comes to elective offices. Although women are currently participating more actively in politics than ever before, they are besieged with challenges of which discrimination is more conspicuous. The psyche of the Nigerian man is often predominated by a chauvinistic disposition that decision making is exclusively for the men folk while women are to be instructed on what to do. The preoccupation that women play the number two role at homes is playing itself out in their political life (Gabriel, 2015:4).

Overall, table 4 below shows the standing of Nigerian women in political participation and performance from 1999 when democratic governance was restored in the country to date while

table 5 depicts the current level of representation of men and women in elective positions in the country. However, efforts by the researcher to get information on the number of women that has been elected into the various houses of assembly proved abortive as visits to the INEC headquarters yielded no positive result. The electoral body is yet to post that information on their website for public perusal.

Table 4: The Standing of Nigerian Women in Political Participation and Performance from 1999 till Date.

S/N	Position	No. of Seats	No. of Women in 1999	2003	2007	2011	2015
1.	Presidency	2	0	0	0	0	0
2.	Senate	109	3	4	8	7	8
3.	House of Reprs	360	12	23	26	26	14
4.	Governorship	36	0	0	0	0	0
5	Deputy Governorship	36	1	2	6	3	4
6	36 State Houses of Assembly	990	12	38	54	62	-
	Total	1533	28	67	94	98	26

Source : Lance-Onyiewu, Maureen (2011), Excerpt from UN Women's Preliminary Analysis of the 2011 General Elections in Nigeria. The column for 2015 is computed by author with data from INEC's web site.

The above record unveils the fact that women still have a long way to go as their level of participation is still very low. The fact that the record of their performance in the House of Assembly elections is not captured in this table does not seem to invalidate the trend of their participation and would normally not deviate much from their standard performance over time judged from their performance in other political offices. A lot of factors can be adduced for this low level performance by women but the issue of political violence, money and godfatherism as well as the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society cannot be ruled out. In fact, although Nigeria have been blessed with several female candidates aspiring to hold political offices but,

the marginalization in all the country’s democratization process still hold women’s political and victory into political offices to much ransom. This tends to validate widespread concerns in spite of a national gender policy that was formulated to promote a 35% affirmative action for women in the political space (a policy that demands 35% involvement of women in all governance process). The fact remains that women are grossly under-represented in the legislative and executive arms of government and are being short-changed in the political activities in the country. This inflates much believe that women are not ripe enough to hold political offices. Meanwhile, women activists and groups in Nigeria had been since 1995, advocating for increase in the number of women in the political space, but very little has been achieved in this regard (Okechukwu et al, 2014:2).

Table 5: Current Representation of Men and Women in Elective Positions (2015).

S/N	Position	Men	Women	Total
1.	President	1	0	1
2.	Vice President	1	0	1
3.	Senate	101	8	109
4.	House of Representatives	346	14	360
5.	Governor	36	0	36
6	Deputy Governor	32	4	36
7	House of Assembly	-	-	990
		<b>517</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1533</b>

Source: Compiled by author with data from INEC web site.

The poor outing by women in the 2015 general elations became most worrisome and disappointing because of the level of preparations carried out by a lot of women advocacy groups. Numerous seminars and conferences aimed at preparing the bulk of Nigerian women with political ambition for the electoral contest were also organized with both local and international participants. As part of the preparations, the Nigerian Women Interparty Forum was launched during one of such events in Lagos. The focus of the conference was “Redefining the Role of Nigerian Women in Political Life” held for female political leaders at the national and local levels from the six leading political parties and women legislators in the National Assembly. The Forum now offers a platform for women beyond the conferences to share experiences, network, advocate and lobby for political space for women within and outside the

political parties. The necessity of this platform was summarized by one of the participants, “women should be empowered and encouraged to aspire for political leadership and governance positions, which is critical to societal and human development” (Olasupo, 2012:16).

Earlier, the Majority leader of the House of Representatives Mulikat Akande-Adeola, said that the conference was aimed at strategizing and preparing women for full participation in politics. She expressed optimism that as from 2015, women’s representation in elective and appointive positions, at the federal, state and local government levels, would increase to 50 percent. Akande-Adeola said that one of the objectives of the conference was ensuring grassroots mobilization in favour of female candidates in 2015. The house leader commended President Goodluck Jonathan for sustaining his minimum quota of 35 per cent of women representation in political positions and offices (Okechukwu et al, 2014:2).

The conference, hosted by the Women’s Democracy Network (WDN) in collaboration with the International Republican Institute (IRI), was led by trainers from around the world with experience in political leadership: Christine Abia Bako, a member of the Ugandan parliament; Deborah Grey, former member of the Canadian parliament; and Michaela Mojzis-Böhm, campaign manager and former General Manager of the Austrian People’s Party. The first day of the conference focused on conducting an assessment of the status of women’s participation in politics using the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) tool, and reviewing strategies utilized by each of the trainers in their political careers which were successful in combating similar barriers. Grey shared her political experiences over her 15 years of public service, citing that a positive attitude, strength and commitment to her beliefs led her to success. Grey also provided guidance on how women can attain and strive in leadership positions in male dominated parties and legislatures based on her experience as minority leader for the Reform Party in Canada. Bako shared her political experiences, as a woman political leader in Africa, with particular focus on how she was able to develop effective outreach strategies to increase women’s political participation in Uganda, noting that “the power of being organized is what will win you an election” (Okechukwu et al, 2014:2).

The fact is that the 2015 general elections did not deviate from the pattern of previous elections although scholars, analysts and even women were optimistic that female aspirations in the political process will receive a boost from the amount of preparations undertaken in that direction. What this means is that the men had once again decided to go on their own as usual

leaving the women to wonder as rudderless ship in a contest that they would have made meaningful impact had policies been put in place to encourage female participation. Several reasons could be adduced for the abysmal performance of women in the just concluded elections, some of which we intend to highlight in the next section of this paper.

### **Challenges Faced by Women in the 2015 General Elections**

At the beginning of the 21st century, over 95 percent of all countries in the world have granted women the two most fundamental democratic rights: the right to vote and the right to stand for election. New Zealand was the first country to give women the right to vote, in 1893; and Finland was the first to adopt both fundamental democratic rights in 1906. There are still a few countries that deny women both the right to vote and the right to stand for elections. In theory, the right to stand for election, to become a candidate and to get elected is based on the right to vote. The reality is, however, that women's right to vote remains restricted, principally because the candidates are mostly male. This is true not only for partial and developing democracies, but for established democracies as well. The low level of women's representation in some European parliaments should be considered a violation of women's fundamental democratic right and, as such, a violation of their basic human rights. This unequal rate of representation in legislative bodies signifies that women's representation, rather than being a consequence of democratization, is more a reflection of a status quo (Shvedova, 2008:32).

Given the above scenario, the truth is that the obstacle to women's participation in politics is a universal phenomenon and not limited to Nigeria although there could be some specific country peculiarities. Therefore, the obstacles faced by Nigerian women during the 2015 general elections will generally not be different from what has been impeding the progress of women in their struggle for political emancipation in a vocation not only dominated by men but seen as their exclusive preserve. The belief that women are not to be heard is one among several challenges that hamper women from political participation. While women represent a formidable force in politics in Nigeria, their enthusiasm and skills have not translated into supporting gender mainstreaming within parties. Thus, there is need for a more integrated strategy to influence the party to support gender mainstreaming.

Nigerian women in politics also faced the challenge of the lack of internal democracy in almost all the political parties in the country. The number of women who scaled through the party's primaries was very low in the last election compared to the number of women who

aspired. Added to this is the issue of consensus which often times does not even give room for any competition between aspirants as most of the candidates are handpicked to contest the various political offices, in a male dominated party executive it could very difficult to give women the chance to compete fairly with their male counterparts. There is also the lack of political will by the party leadership to implement measures that can aid women aspirations, for instance, late President Yar'Adua had promised to give 30 percent of political appointments to women (less than the 35 percent in the National Gender Policy). But an assessment conducted by ActionAid after one year indicated that women appointment was only 11 percent. President Goodluck Jonathan increased it to 32% (Anenih, 2011:12). In the word of Nadezhda Shvedova (2008:32) “men dominate the political arena; men formulate the rules of the political game; and men define the standards for evaluation. The existence of this male dominated model results in women either rejecting politics altogether or rejecting male-style politics”.

The 2015 general election witnessed a lot of political violence which resulted numerous deaths of party supporters agents and even innocent Nigerian voters. These included ballot snatching and stuffing, thuggery, vote buying, collation and declaration of fake results among other corrupt tendencies which definitely put women at a disadvantage as they are hardly able to match the male candidates in rigging and these other electoral vices. In fact, where they would even muster the courage to do so, they lack the financial muscle to finance such ventures as their male counterparts most of whom are incumbent political office holders with the paraphernalia of office attached to their offices intact at the point of electoral contest. Nigeria is still a nation where political violence (rioting, bombing, destruction of property) is prevalent not only in the lead-up to the Election Day but also the aftermath. One telling example is the 2011 Northern Nigerian post-election violence that resulted in 800 deaths (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Political violence is a huge barrier for Nigerian women's participation in elections due to the violent and intimidating behaviors that constitute election time.

According to the National Democratic Institute's “Final Report on the 2011 Nigerian Elections”, as far as running for election goes, many women are dissuaded due to “high levels of competition, the often violent nature of Nigerian politics and deeply held prejudices against female politicians”, with some women reporting pressure to withdraw their candidacies, harassment and physical attacks (NDI, 2011:45). The late Mrs. Emily Olufunke Omope-Aborisade, also known as “Ms. Thatcher” for her unwavering determination in Ekiti state

politics, was a victim of political violence when she was bathed in acid for supporting the then Executive Governor of Ekiti state in his bid for a second term in office in 2002. In addition to financial inequality for campaigning, this tragic occurrence describes the atmosphere that can foster intimidation in women who want to become involved with Nigerian politics (Irabor, 2012).

Equally, there are other religious and cultural challenges which women find it difficult to surmount. From the ones that concern the hours of meetings which often times is held in the mid night to those that involve visits to shrines for oath administration for loyalty and commitment, the women are disadvantaged as they can hardly subject themselves to such political manipulations in the name of getting a slot for representation in whatever office that they may aspire. In fact, for women in the Muslim sect, it is very difficult for them to break the barriers of both culture and religion to aspire for elective positions.

On a more general note, in most countries, women perceive politics as a ‘dirty’ game. This has jarred their confidence in their ability to participate in political processes. In fact, such a perception is prevalent worldwide. Unfortunately, this perception reflects the reality in many countries. Although the reasons for this differ, there are some common trends. The basis of passive corruption can be explained by an exchange between the advantages and benefits of the public market (e.g. legislation, budget bills) and of the economic market (e.g. funds, votes, employment), which seek financial gains by escaping competition and by fostering monopolistic conditions. In addition to this, a significant increase in the cost of election campaigning has become obvious, and this in turn increases the temptation to use any source of money that becomes available (Shvedova, 2008:32).

Corruption can have many faces. Bribery and extortion in the public sector, as well as the procurement of goods and services, are key manifestations of it. Although new democracies need time to establish themselves and to develop roots, corruption has spread further in countries where the process of political and economic transformation is taking shape in the absence of civil society, and where new institutions are emerging. However, in many places where the changes in the political and economic system have already taken place, the market economy has become enmeshed in the ‘law of the jungle’, the mafia and corruption (Shvedova, 2008:32). In Nigeria corruption manifest itself in diverse forms and even the electoral umpires have not been left out of the process. Unconfirmed reports abound in the media that many INEC officials soiled their



palms during the just concluded 2015 elections and such colluded with corrupt politicians to rig the elections in favour of some candidates.

### **Women and Electoral Contest in Nigeria: The Way Forward**

One of the major impediments to women participation in elective politics is the level of violence that has been trailing the electoral process in the country. Political violence negates women's chances at the polls and in political participation thus, the State should ensure full security for women and girls during election periods and end this impunity. Political Parties should commit to non-violent campaigning and desist from hate speech while non-violent education should be mainstreamed in all awareness raising and voter education campaigns by all players. The State should safeguard freedom of movement, expression and assembly for all citizens especially women during and even after elections.

Additionally, perpetrators of political violence should be brought to justice. Nigerian women need more than economic empowerment for success at the polls. This highlights the need for the establishment of a special tribunal for the trial of perpetrators of election violence, a situation where numerous lives will be lost during elections and the perpetrators continue to walk the streets free without any arrest and prosecution is undesirable and government should do all within its powers to bring such culprits to justice. Adequate compensation should be paid to victims and their families. A situation where a suspect of political violence would contest for party primaries, contest and win election and get an arrangement for bail thereafter questions the political will of government to address political violence. The report of the 22 person panel inaugurated by President Goodluck Jonathan to look into the causes of the post election violence in 2011 should be made public and the recommendation implemented to the letter to deter future occurrence and guarantee security (Irabor, 2012).

Furthermore, the government should emphasize the need to educate and even train political parties on women's political participation and their impact on democracy and good governance. Such training will expose the political parties to basic principles of internal democracy, gender and democratic governance. Similarly, gender sensitive provisions should be mandatorily included in party's constitution and manifestoes as this will serve the purpose of mainstreaming gender into its activities. In addition government should take steps to assess and examine the process of the conduct of party primaries with a view to formulating and implementing reforms that will support a more gender friendly process and as well create a level

playing field for all participants. At best the electoral law should be amended to include a clause for independent candidacy which may help extricate women from the web of male dominated political parties.

There is also need for the establishment of a Women's Political Institute where parties and all female candidates should be trained and equipped with relevant skills that can empower and embolden them to compete favourably with their male counterparts in any elective position of their choice. This will further challenge them to improve their level of education and enable them cope with the challenges and demands of electoral contest (Irabor, 2012).

Finally, women activists and groups should be active in the fight against corruption and bribery and as well be at the forefront of the advocacy for electoral reforms that will make the use of money during elections a criminal offence in which both the giver and receiver of such monies are culpable. In fact, there is greater need for the adoption of the recommendations of the Justice Uwais Electoral Reform Commission on representation of women and persons with disabilities on proportional basis with respect to selection of candidates for elective office as circumstances may permit by parties during party primaries. This will be in line with temporary special measures to accelerate equality between men and women. At best political parties should be compelled to adopt a gender quota that will reserve certain number of seats in the national and state assemblies as well as other elective positions for female aspirants and candidates. This in fact, has been the case in some African countries. The classic example is Rwanda, which had 48.8 per cent of seats in its lower house of Parliament held by women in 2003.

## **Conclusion**

This paper examined the performance of women in the just concluded 2015 general elections as a part means of assessing how they fared so far in elective politics. It discovered that there is no marked improvement in the performance of women and by extension their representation in that electoral contest in comparison to past ones. This situation of women under representation becomes worrisome given the expectations and predictions from scholars, analysts and even the media that democratic rule in Nigeria is beginning to deepen and as such women would perform better in that election. In fact, it became more disappointing when weighed against the level of preparations witnessed in the build-up to the elections for women enlightenment, education and empowerment particularly through conferences, seminars and workshops organized for women both locally and internationally. This paper uncovers the glaring fact that Nigerian women are

still some distance away from gender equity and balancing in spite of some of the policies put in place to assist gender mainstreaming as the men have refused to act in ways that can accelerate the attainment by women of the 35% affirmative action whether now or in the nearest future. This paper therefore concludes that the 2015 general elections were “of men, by men and for men”.

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