

Gender Issues and Electoral Security in Nigeria (1999- 2023)

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ABSTRACT

The participation of women in electoral politics and security has become an important issue in the global arena. This is because women bear the brunt of conflicts and insecurity in most societies. Since the return of democracy in 1999 in Nigeria, there is a growing concern on the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence against women especially during electoral processes. Thus, the primary focus of this paper is to establish the link between gender-based electoral violence and low level of women participation in politics, it also seeks to examine the extent to which women have been excluded and violated in security and political related electoral processes. The paper reveals that women's participation in electoral processes appear to be minimal, while electoral violence issues targeting women during elections in Nigeria appear to be alarmingly high. It further analyses the plethora of factors that are responsible for the continuous exclusion, violation, and discrimination of women in electoral processes. Thus, the paper explores measures that are required to promote and ensure sustained women inclusion in electoral processes, noting that leadership, decision-making, policy analyses, and policy actions should include men and women. From the research, the paper shows a glaring gap between gender participation in issues relating to electoral processes in Nigeria. It therefore recommends the need for interventions/initiatives by governments, political actors, Civil Society Organizations through development of legal frameworks and policies that will promote the inclusion and full participation of women in electoral processes towards a peaceful and sustainable Nigeria.

Keywords: Democracy, Gender, Security, Elections, Women, Violence.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, women constitute a significant percentage of the world's population and play a vital role in the development of society. Despite this, many societies including Nigeria have rendered women a subordinate role in the political arena (VAWIE, 2016). Women have been a great source of support to the election of political leaders. There is a growing international recognition that violence against women in politics is a global scourge that marginalizes women in political and public life.

Despite the experience of having six successive elected governments since the return to democracy in May 1999, Nigeria democratic experience has not expended opportunities for meaningful participation and representation of women in politics and governance. In the 2019 general elections, for instance, out of the 109 senatorial seats, women occupied seven and out of the 360 seats in the House of Representatives, women occupied only 11 seats.

This is against the background of women accounting for about 47.14% (39,598,645 million) of the 84,004,084 million registered voters nationwide .While in 2023 the total number of female registered voters

account for 47.5% 44,414,846 million, (premium times online newspapers. January 11, 2023).

Although Women represent about half (50%) the population of Nigeria (VAWIE, 2016), they occupy a very insignificant percent of electoral and appointive political positions. Gender inequality permeates every level of Nigerian society including the political sphere. However, the since the country returned to democratic governance in 1999, the current political landscape especially elections has been associated with violence, thuggery, abductions, killings and intimidations of opposition irrespective of their gender affinity. It is a male dominated chauvinistic society stifled by culture, tradition and social rankings that promotes gender inequality and women discrimination in the scheme of things (Rasak & Garuba, 2017).

Women's political participation in Nigeria is greatly affected by patriarchal values and the pervasive violence rampant in politics. Also, Agbalajobi (2010) explains that the decline in the number of women in active politics can be associated with series of violence and intimidation associated with Nigerian political system because; political intimidation and violence have taken the centre stage in Nigerian politics. There is increasing acknowledgement that there is a link between violence against women and the level at which women are active in the electoral process. Ouedraogo and Ouedraogo (2019) have submitted that, political violence undermines an electoral process and that essential to women's participation is the eradication of political violence. In Nigeria for instance, in the year leading up to the 2011 Nigerian elections, female politicians and the wives and family members of male political candidates have not only experienced heightened levels of gender-based hate speech, but have in some cases, been directly targeted by thugs and criminals for physical violence, such as killings, abductions, beating, destruction of property, rape e.t.c.

For instance, on 19th November, 2019 Mrs Salome Acheju Abu, Peoples Democratic Party's (PDP) Women Leader was burnt alive in her home at Ochadamu, Kogi state. Similarly, on 29th November, 2022, gunmen killed the Woman Leader of Labour Party (LP), Victoria Chintex, in Kaura Local government area of Kaduna state. All of these actions are direct examples of violence against women in politics, a tactic used to reinforce entrenched patriarchal values and undermine the integration and representation of women's experiences and perspectives into governance processes and institutions (Blythe, 2015). This violence can take many forms including psychological threats, sexual harassment and abuse, and physical abuse and these harms hamper women's ability to exercise political voice through voting, activism, public dialogue, campaigning and running for or holding office. Within the spectrum of violence against women in politics, gender-based electoral violence can take place before, during or after elections. More commonly, women are the secondary victims of election-related violence as a result of their family relationships and social affiliations. In other words, women are often targeted not through their actions but because of their associations, such as being the wife, mother or daughter of a political candidate. It is against this backdrop that this paper interrogates gender an issues in Nigerian electoral security.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Election

Elections are a central feature of democratic governance, a testimony to peoples' sovereignty. Elections have meaning for most people only in a democratic context, because they lead to the choice of decision makers by the majority of citizens. Okoye (2007) defined election as:

a complex set of activities with different variables that act and feed on one another. It can be defined as a formal act of collective decision that occurs in a stream of connected antecedents and subsequent behaviour. It involves the participation of the people in the act of electing their leaders and their own participation in governance.

Elections are not necessarily about Election Day activities although it forms an important component. It

encompasses activities before, during and after elections. It includes the legal and constitutional framework of elections, the registration of political parties, party campaigns, the activities of the electronic and print media in terms of access; it includes campaign financing, the activities of the security agencies and the government in power. It includes the authenticity and genuineness of the voters register; it includes the independence or lack of it of electoral agencies and organs. It includes the liberalism or otherwise of the political process in the country and the independence of adjudicating bodies of elections.

Electoral Security

In its simplest form, electoral security is refers to the protection of electoral stakeholders (e.g. voters, candidates, poll workers, media and observers); electoral information (e.g. vote results, registration data, and campaign materials); electoral facilities (e.g. polling stations and counting centers); and electoral events (e.g. campaign rallies) against death, damage or disruption (Albert, 2007). This implies that electoral security has both coercive and non-coercive dimensions, spanning across the three stages of election process, namely; pre-election period, Election Day and post-election period. As a sensitive element of the democratic process, the peaceful conduct of election is sacrosanct. According to Ojo Ademowo (2015, p.7) electoral security entails:

... securing the holistic integrity of the electoral process, especially now that elections are increasingly seen as a key component of peace-building process and a cornerstone of dynamic social interaction. Hence, electoral security must address protection from the physical, psychological and structural threats against the electorate and the citizenry at large, without undue consideration for party affiliation, ethnic sentiment, historical antecedent, religious divide, or any other form of social differences. The bottom line is that a political environment that is free from threat to electoral security is determined by ensuring that political parties and their candidates win in the scheme of power without jeopardizing the safety of rivals and the citizenry, and without distorting the sanctity of the electoral process.

From a broad perspective, Albert (2007, p.135) identified four kinds of electoral security (and associated targets) thus:

Physical security: concerns the protection of facilities and materials, including the electoral commission headquarters and its district offices; registration and polling stations; political party offices; election observer offices; and media organizations. Facilities can also include the residences of election officials or candidates as well as hotels known to be frequented by international visitors, media or observers.

Personal security: focuses on electoral stakeholders, including voters, public officials, election workers, security forces, candidates, party agents, election observers and media representatives. The gender, age and ethnicity of human targets should be noted. People can be victims of assassination, torture, sexual assault, strategic displacement, physical injury, blackmail or intimidation in attempts to influence their involvement and choices in an election.

Information security: concerns protection of computers and communication systems employed in voter registration and vote tabulation, as well as associated sensitive election materials such as voted and un-voted ballots and voter registration lists. Their theft or destruction could have a potential “show stopper” impact on the election.

It can be deduced from the above that Nigeria electoral process is synonymous to electoral insecurity. Electoral insecurity is perpetrated in electoral violence, which manifests in physical, psychological and structural dimensions. Ojo and Ademowo (2015) argued that physical electoral violence is a situation where there is a physical assault, which may include any of the following acts: ‘thuggery’ or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral stakeholders or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person

connected with the electoral process. Psychological electoral conflict manifests in terms of indiscriminate pasting of campaign posters, chanting slogans, intimidation of political opponents, bias media reportage, abuse of statutory responsibilities by the electoral institution, the security agencies and the judiciary, unequal access to public media by political parties of varying status, and abuse of office by traditional rulers in terms of intimidating the masses to perform their electoral rights against their political will (Ladan, 2005). Women are more vulnerable or susceptible to all forms of electoral violence.

Women and Political Representation in Nigeria

Issues concerning women empowerment, equality and their participation in politics are no longer new to scholarly discussions and in academia because since the late 20th 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 (Agbalajobi, 2010). Indeed, Izugbara and Onuoha (2003) 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. 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.

Agbalajobi (2010) 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.

Women have contested for different positions in the five 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 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, the representation of women seeking the office of governor and deputy governor was 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).

The same level of underrepresentation manifested in the 2019 elections. Egwu (2020) reported that 2,970 women were on the electoral ballot, representing 11.36% of nominated candidates. As at the time of this report, 62 women had been elected, and given that there were contested cases, it would represent a decline from the 2015-19 periods, where women formed 5.66% of elected officials (Egwu, 2020). This is a drop from the 8th Senate where women accounted for 6.42% of the total number of elected Senators. Figures from the House of Representatives also showed a steep decline from the 8th House. About 533 women contested representing 11.39% of nominees. However only 11(3.05%) were elected as at the time of this report (Enwo-Irem, 2019). At the State level, no woman was elected Governor, although women formed 3.07% of the total contestants. Of the 275 women representing 11.40% of candidates for deputy governorships, only four in Enugu, Kaduna, Ogun and Rivers had been elected (Egwu, 2020). Thus, the number of female Deputy Governors declined from six in the 2015 – 19 regimes, to four (Egwu, 2020).

The decline in the number of women in active politics can be associated with series of violence and intimidation associated with Nigerian political system because, political intimidation and violence have

taken the centre stage in Nigerian politics, and many politicians in the country today rely on this strategy for attaining electoral victory (Anya, 2015). This scares many women off and presents the political environment as very hostile. Political brutality is employed to distract women's attention from participating in politics, sometimes they are beaten up, their family members are threatened, their marriages are set up for destruction, and these strategies scare women from the political race.

Electoral Violence against Women in Nigeria

Violence against women in political life, including in and beyond elections, is any act of, or threat of, gender-based violence, resulting in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women, that prevents them from exercising and realizing their political rights, whether in public or private spaces, including the right to vote and hold public office, to vote in secret and to freely campaign, to associate and assemble, and to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression (UN Women and UNDP, 2018). Such violence can be perpetrated by a family member, community member and/or by the State. Women involved in elections as voters, public officials, election officials or candidates are targets for electoral violence specifically because they are women. Violence against Women in Election (VAIE) is both a subset of Violence against Women (VAW) and a distinct area of political and electoral violence. It typically occurs in one of the three standard contexts – family, community, or the state. VAWIE is also distinct from these contexts as elections are competitive processes that can generate conflict and target women with violence. This form of violence can occur in either a public space, such as political rallies and polling stations, or in private spaces, such as the home.

Melander (2016) defined VAWIE as any act of gender-based election violence that specifically targets women for reasons such as their aspirations to seek political office, their link to political activities or simply their commitment to vote and be voted for, as well as any random or organized acts of violence that affect women, as perpetrators seek to delay or influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, misinformation, physical assault, blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination. It is also important to recognize that non-gender motivated electoral violence can still have a disproportionately high impact on women because of their subordinate status in society and their heightened level of vulnerability. The study revealed that that female aspirants were sometimes physically stopped from either accessing venues for primary elections or even attending party meetings of which they belong. Wives were beaten by their husbands or youths at polling units for voting for their preferred candidates (VAWIE, 2016).

The women in Nigeria have experienced different types of electoral violence which can be identified as physical, sexual, psychological, socio-economic and harmful traditional practices. These experiences find their root cause in a highly male dominant society. According to UN Women and UNDP/DGD (2018), between 21st and 30th March, 2011 alone, 75% of the field monitors reporting an incident or incidents of violence that were targeted specifically at women. The largest number of these incidents reportedly took place during political campaigns or rallies, while others occurred at political party events. The perpetrators were identified as primarily party supporters and agents. This further underscores the real need to engage political parties in promoting peaceful elections in Nigeria (UNDP/DGD, 2016).

The report further revealed that the most common forms of violence reported were intimidation, physical harm, murder and death threats either to particular women candidates, their family members or ordinary women who are party supporters. The largest number of victims was ordinary women party supporters or potential voters (14.8%) and women candidates (13%) (UNDP/DGD, 2018).

Since the inception of democracy, the cases of violence against women have been on the rise. Most recent is the gruesome killing of Labour Party Women Leader in Southern Kaduna, Mrs. Victoria Chintex. It will be recalled that on 19th November 2019, the late Salome Abuh – PDP woman leader in Kogi State, was killed and burnt beyond recognition in her home in Kogi State (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room, 2019). The

statement also cited the case of Natasha Akpoti, a Social Democratic Party (SDP) governorship candidate at the time, who was physically assaulted by political opponents while she was attending a stakeholders' meeting in her home state in November 2019. Also, in October 2021, Mrs. Cynthia Nwala, Leader of the Legislative Council in Etche Local Government, Rivers State, was battered and stripped near naked in the council premises by male politicians during a leadership crisis among the councilors.

It is most disappointing that the Nigerian state still have these regular incidents in an era where ending violence against women is a priority and their voices actively encouraged, as well as perpetrators of violence against women made to pay for their crimes.

Violence against Women in Elections: A Critical Issue for Nigeria's Electoral Security

Violence against women plays a significant role in deterring women from running for electoral offices or encouraging them to withdraw from their campaigns or resign from their positions after being elected. In countries with already low rates of women's political participation, VAWE may discourage women from entering politics. Violence at polling stations and against electoral staff may also discourage women from engaging in these vital areas of electoral administration, which in turn may further reduce women's turnout and ease with the election process (UN Women, 2020). Violence at the community and family level results in coercing women's political choices and violating civil liberties.

Therefore, effective electoral process, which epitomises electoral security in its holistic terms, will provide the synergy for inclusive political participation which in turn will provide a template for political stability and sustainable development in Nigeria. Oftentimes, the Security services offer the 'first line of defence' in maintaining peace and social order. Electoral security in Nigeria is primarily handled by police (Eniola, 2018). In other words, the police are primarily saddled with the responsibility of making sure that people exercise their voting rights in an orderly manner with the help of other paramilitary organizations. But it got a level that military have to participate in this process. The participation of security men is now becoming more alarming. Since the situation has even degenerated to the level that hardly could Nigeria conduct any election without abundant of security men.

At times, however, the approach by which they do this has been criticized as heavy-handed by human rights groups, and unlikely to endear those alienated from the State or local Government. Although UN Women has supported the Nigerian Federal Police Force to develop its gender policy, this is not fully implemented and its effects have yet to be felt at community level. In regard to the military, women and girls are often intimidated by the presence of Joint Task Force (JTF) members at checkpoints. As in much of the rest of Nigeria, women and girls in the north remain vulnerable to gender-based and sexual violence and do not have access to proper protection, redress mechanisms or victim support services.

The gender-specific needs of women facing violent conflicts tend to be ignored and women are left to pick up the pieces of their lives, and that of their wards, all alone (Yahaya & Umar, 2018). Often, women's access to formal remedial measures is not prioritized because abuses against women and girls are primarily seen as a private matter. If cases of Gender-based Violence (GBV) are reported to police, they tend to get settled informally as the victim or the victim's families often withdraw the cases for fear of further attacks or pressure. Or the case fails to get prosecuted owing to the lack of thorough investigation by the police or inadequate evidence collection. Social stigma is leading to likely widespread under-reporting of cases of GBV.

There is growing recognition that women in conflict situations must not be viewed only as victims, but as powerful agents for peace and security in their communities, since women bear a heavy burden in conflict and post conflict societies, and reconstruct destroyed communities. While there have been discussions at all policy levels on Women, Peace and Security(WPS), there has been less policy recognition of women as

agents of change at the national and community level. This is the main reason why it is important to analyze women’s participation through the lens of peace processes. Peace building and reconstruction efforts can be enhanced and sustained by including women in peacemaking. On the other hand, Looze (2017) attests that in some instances, women, have been found to perpetrate violence directly or indirectly as wives, combatants, informants or couriers. In other words, women’s engagement with violent conflict is problematic and not to be read off automatically in terms of female victimhood.

Women are regarded as weaker sexes; a social construct that relies on social values, norms and beliefs, which have neglected their meaningful contributions and have placed them in a subordinate position to men in the nation’s political system. During elections, women are exposed to different types of election violence which take the forms of physical, sexual, psychological, socio-economic and harmful traditional practices. Gender-based violence in politics and elections is increasingly visible, ranging from the escalation of harassment, intimidation, sexual and physical violence against women in public life and gender-base scrutiny by the public and the media, to forced resignations and assassinations of women politicians in the most extreme cases. As elections are the main event by which formal political power is established and voting rights are realized. Violence Against Women in Election (VAWE) remains the highest barrier to women realizing their political rights. Men are found to be at the leading edge of perpetrating VAWIE alongside the different societal structures at their beck and call which include security personnel, husbands and the youths.

Violence against Women in Elections (VAWIE) limits the participation of Women (who constitute about half of the population) in an electoral process therefore, undermining the integrity of the entire process and its outcome. This is a total violation of democratic principles, which stipulates that all citizens have the legal right to participate in the process of electing credible leaders. Sustained insecurity that precipitates violence hinders the participation of women in the electoral process as voters, candidates, election observers, election officials, and election security officers, among others. They undermine the legitimacy of electoral processes and the acceptability of outcomes. Thus, a major challenge to elections in Nigeria has since the return to democracy order in 1999, remained the conduct of violence free elections. Against this background, security agencies and government institutions collaborate with the Independent National Electoral Commission to deploy individuals, including women as election observers election officials and election security officers to manage and monitor the process

Table 1: Statistics of Gender Based Pre, During and Post Election Violence in Nigeria

Name	Year	Type of violence	Location	Source
	1999	Widespread violence leading to an estimated death of 80	Across the country	African Security Review published online 7 th July 2015
	2003	Widespread violence leading to an estimated death of 400	Across the country	African Security Review published online 7 th July 2015
	2007	Claim 300 lives	Across the country	African Security Review published online 7 th July 2015

	2011	800 people were killed (highest number of lives lost during elections	Across the country	African Security Review published online 7 th July 2015
Tosin Teide	3rd May, 2011	Raped and killed	Bauchi State	Online vanguard newspaper published 4 th May, 2011
10 NYSC Corp members slain	3 rd May, 2011	Killed	Bauchi State	Online vanguard E newspaper 4 th May, 2011
Female police officer(ID not disclosed)	March, 2021	Shot and killed	Ekiti State	Online Sahara reporters March, 2021
An un identified woman	4 th December 2015	Killed	Bayelsa State	Online peninsula newspaper published 6 th December, 2015
An un identified woman	6 th December 2015	Killed	Bayelsa State	Online peninsula newspaper published 6 th December, 2015
	2015	100 other people have been killed	Across Nigeria	African Security Review published online 7 th July 2015
PDP Women leader Salome Acheju Abuh	24 th November, 2019	Burnt alive in her house	Kogi State	Online Premium times published November 2019
Mrs Cynthia Nwala Leader of legislative council Etche LGA	October, 2021	Battered and stripped naked and her vehicle vandalized	Rivers state	Vanguard newspaper 5 th October 2021
A female ad-hoc staff	February 2019	Hit by a stray bullet	Rivers State	Maurice , O. & Kemi, O. (2022)
A local female election observer	2019	Shot dead	Enugu	Maurice , O. & Kemi, O. (2022)
Victoria chintex women leader of Labour Party (LP)	29 th November, 2022	Killed by gun men	Kaduna State	Online Channel TV 29 TH November, 2022

Helen Taiwo women leader of Labour Party	7 TH December, 2022	Kidnapped	Edo State	Online channel TV 29 TH November, 2022
A young lady in Ezike in Igboeze North LGA	2 nd May, 2022	Viciously raped	Enugu State	Maurice , O. & Kemi, O. (2022)
A 75-year old woman in Nkwelle Awkuza	July , 2022	Raped	Anambra State	Maurice , O. & Kemi, O. (2022)
10 female students, ages between 15 and 19 years of Akwakuma Girls Secondary School,	8 th March, 2022	Went missing without trace	Imo State	Maurice , O. & Kemi, O. (2022)
No fewer than 11 people at Igangan town	June, 2021	Death and Injuries	OYO State	Maurice , O. & Kemi, O. (2022)
5 people lost their lives while many sustained injuries in clashes that happened in Imeko, Afon LGA	June, 2021	Death and Injuries	OGUN State	Maurice , O. & Kemi, O. (2022)
An unidentified group killed an estimated 10 people in Akoko	1 st November 2022	Killed	Edo State	Maurice , O. & Kemi, O. (2022)
120 people have been killed across the	Between 2014 to 2022	Killed and kidnapped	South south (Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa,Cross River, Rivers and Delta)	Maurice , O. & Kemi, O. (2022)
Governor Tambuwal aide dies following a stampede at PDP Presidential rally	4 th February 2023	Death	Sokoto State	Online Punch Newspaper 4 TH February 2023
One killed as gunmen bomb INEC Office, Police facility in Ojoto	4 th February 2023	Killed	Anambra State	Online Premium Times 4 th February, 2023

Source: Researcher’s Compilation 2023.

Gender-Based Pre- 2023 Elections Security Threat Assessment in Nigeria

The public campaigns by political parties towards the 2023 elections kicked off on 28 September 2022, and so far, the political environment is becoming heated with violence, hate speeches, indicting comments, cyber bullying, etc. since the beginning of the campaigns, there have been several attacks on campaigners and INEC structures in some states. This has brought about the fear of violence ahead of the elections and may affect the participation of election officials deployed for the elections.

Towards the 2023 general elections, women’s candidature in the across the country is unimpressive, as indicated by the outcome of party primaries by political parties to elect their flag bearers for the 2023 general elections. For the presidential elections, men swamp women by a 17.1 ratio; and there is no female

candidate for the vice president. The results of the primaries show an insignificant number of women as political candidates in the country.

Mapping Security Threats to Women Participation in Electoral Processes

In the build-up to the 2023 general elections, women in Nigeria are likely to face a plethora of security threats. These existing and emerging security threats, which have the potential of hampering or retarding women's participation in the forthcoming elections, including direct/ physical threats (hard drugs consumption, operations of criminal groups known as unknown gunmen, rape, verbal abuse, etc) structural threats (discrimination alienation, etc) and psychological threats (hate speech, false accusation, blackmail, etc)

During the campaigns for the November 2021 gubernatorial election, Anambra state recorded 52 cases of violence against women in politics. The drop in women's participation in the gubernatorial election was attributed to violence against women in the form of threats, hate speech, assault, blackmail, intimidation, attempted murder, and psychological violence. Regarding voting in the 2023 elections, the country is likely to witness reduced participation of women as voters due to fear of harm, intimidation and death.

The menace of "Unknown Gunmen" (UGM), Kidnapping for ransom, Banditry remains a big security threat in Nigeria and women will be very vulnerable to them as campaigns and political activities intensify before the 2023 general elections.

Challenges Affecting Women Participation In Politics In Nigeria

The challenges facing women are enormous, however, researchers have shown that the under-listed are likely responsible for the huge marginalization of Nigerian women in electoral processes.

Patriarchy: It refers to a society ruled and dominated by men over women, which in turn has given rise to women being looked upon as mere household wives and non-partisans in decision making process in households not to talk of coming out to vie for political positions.

Stigmatization: Following the way politics in Nigeria is played, it is being perceived that it is for individuals that have no regards for human right and are quick at compromising their virtue for indecent gains. Therefore, women aspirants who ventured into politics are looked upon as shameless and promiscuous.

Low: level of education: The low participation of women in education is also part of the shortcomings. The National Adult Literacy Survey, 2010 published by National Bureau of Statistics revealed that the adult literacy rate in English in Nigeria is 50.6 per cent while literacy in any other language is 63.7 per cent (female adult age 15 and above). This explains why most women are least qualified for political offices due to low educational attainment. This is also an effect of colonialism, where men were more favoured than women.

Meeting Schedules: The time scheduled for caucus meetings to strategize and map out political plans either for the pre or post-election periods are odd and are not conducive for responsible and family women. The slated time are often time which women are expected to take care of their children and family. This method of schedules is viewed as an attempt to sidelining women from engaging in political process.

Financing: Competing for political positions in Nigerian requires huge financial backup. Most Nigerian women who seek these positions could not afford meeting the financial obligations therein, despite the wavers giving to women aspirants by some of the political parties. And so, they could do little or nothing to outweigh their male counterparts.

Political Violence: Nigerian elections have always been characterized by one form of violence or another since the return of democracy. Female aspirants of various political parties cannot withstand political violence; therefore, women participation in politics is drastically reduced.

Religious and Cultural barriers: Both Christianity and Islam do not accord women much role in public life, and same is obtainable in most cultural values, where women are seen culturally as quite submissive and image of virtue. However, they are not to be seen in public domain. And so it is a challenge to women participation in politics, more so, Women are found in the corridor of politics are not often religious in practice.

Displacement: The Internal displaced population is composed of an estimated 53% women. Women play vital roles in family and community development, they are key agents in successful peace, conflict resolution and electoral processes. Women experience the trauma and ariel of violence ranging from rape, discrimination, abduction, kidnapping and killings in IDP camps. In spite of the huge number of women that suffer as a result of displacement, they are disenfranchised from their rights to vote and be voted for due reoccurring displacement. They are also underrepresented in electoral processes. Despite the existence of international, regional and national legal instruments that guarantee women's inclusive participation in electoral processes.

CONCLUSION

The research found that threats such as political intimidation, harassment, abductions, kidnapping and killing, hate speeches, unknown gunmen killings may impede women participation in the 2023 election processes as voters, candidates, election observers, election officials and Security personnel. Other threats identified include sexual violence, discrimination, alienation, attacks by armed groups and drug abuse. The study also found that violence against women, which tends to impede their participation in the election processes, has remained largely unpunished due to the absence of an Electoral Offences Commission or Tribunal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings and conclusion, this article suggest the following as measures of addressing gender issues towards improving Nigeria's electoral security:

1. There is need for sustained awareness and value re-orientation campaign on the importance of politics that is free from violence so that more women can confidently participate in politics and contribute their own quota to national development.
2. Strengthen capacity of Security agencies to effectively handle VAWIE cases. The security agencies should go all out to protect everyone either male or female. Their job descriptions and limits should also be given to them as they are recruited into various security agencies.
3. Nigerian women must continue the war for the domestication of the various international conventions and instruments that advocate gender equality. In this regard, it is important to state that in order to purge violence out of politics in Nigeria, the men must support women to actualize their full potentials in politics by ridding themselves of the inherited stereotypes and prejudices against women. This would encourage more women to venture into the leadership circles.
4. There should an increased understanding about the the violence against women in elections in Nigeria, to enable Policy makers, Political actors, and civil society activists to develop informed interventions to combat the ugly phenomenon and create opportunities for women to participate in politics without fear that they will be subjected to any form of violence.
5. Political Parties should ensure that their candidates abide by the provisions of the political parties

Code of Conduct and Electoral Act that Prohibit violence.

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