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## **Addressing the Gender Bias: Positioning Nigeria's Democracy for Good Governance and Sustainable Development**

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**Abstract:** Democratic governance in sub-Saharan Africa has been hindered by institutional barriers and discrimination, manifesting in social and biological disparities. Politics ought to bring a balance between both genders in leadership and decision-making roles in society. Moreover, representation is biased, with a disproportional population of males to females. Arguably, politics is a game of numbers, but why does the Nigerian political system intentionally sideline women from equal participation in Nigerian political activities? The study identifies one gender as underrepresented in political leadership roles, where achieving gender parity and equal representation has not only posed a barrier to national integration but has also become a significant challenge to developing democracies, particularly in Nigeria, since the commencement of its Fourth Republic. This paper used qualitative methods, through content analysis and secondary data from journals, literature and documentaries to situate the underrepresentation of the female gender in many leadership positions. Consequently, this has deprived the female gender of unequal access to resources and power, a biased division of labour, and discrimination against women in terms of rights and advantages in the emerging democracy. Theoretically, feminism, gender and patriarchy were used to underscore the plague of misogyny rocking the Nigerian state, especially in governance and political spaces. Gender mainstreaming and the revolutionisation of women's empowerment is crucial for greater political development in Nigeria. Conclusively, governance should be characterised by the active engagement of all citizens and women in decision-making. This calls for reorienting the developing democracy toward accountability, openness, and sound leadership for sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Democracy; gender, gender bias; good governance; sustainable development.

### **Introduction**

Gender issues between males and females patterned along economic, social and political roles, have been subjected to debates, not only in Sub-Saharan Africa, but in other established democracies, where the plight of politically inclined female individuals has been that of second fiddle, except in a few cases like Namibia, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mauritius and Malawi where women were elected as presidents. Politics and leadership are still rancorous along gender bias- men and women, with a significant number of women still ostracised in the decision-making and leadership of many countries. Before the advent of the Europeans, the underrepresentation of women in both partisan and elective politics had also been underestimated. Ekpenyong et al. (2015) observe that the history of Nigerian politics is replete to a large extent with male-centric,

institutionalising chauvinistic politics, which a few scholars (Adisa et al., 2020), Olowuniyi (2022) & Mensah (2023) attributed to patriarchy, which typifies the Nigerian polity. However, the lingering assumption of women marginalisation cum their under-representation in Nigerian political affairs was birthed by the successive colonial administrations of Indirect Rule Systems (Okpanachi, 2024). Olatunji (2022) and Agbalajobi (2010) comment that Nigerian men have captured the state's apparatuses to oppress and exploit women as well as push them back to non-recognisable political significance. Politics is a way of life and remains an aspect of every human society, primarily dealing with institutions that establish and influence the administration of individuals with specific reference to a territory. Pennock et al. (1967) submit that politics, widely, regulates the course of life and actions of every society. Consequently, one could say that the soundness, virility, strength, coherence, peace, unity and advancement of socio-economic status that a community benefits from are offshoots of its political apparatus. Arguably, assets, like mortal, natural, and economic, are regulated by a minority, who have shown concern as representatives, in controlling the entire population. To cater for the well-being of individuals, both males and females ought to participate wholeheartedly in politics. From all indications, extensive research portrays the political terrain of Africa's most populous state as one that is skewed in favour of males over females (Afolabi, 2008).

Arguably, the Nigerian polity is not only biased against women, but it also marginalises women in political and public circles. Though, the female gender portends a more significant number than the male, canvassing for political posts and leadership positions in society still appears threatening in the space with patriarchal pathology. Based on their global population of 58% in 2022, women have the potential to lead as much as men and be relevant at the highest echelon of public and private life. However, different challenges against their leadership trajectory constrain them. According to the available reports in Nigeria (NBS Annual Report, 2021), women constitute a substantial and pertinent part, thus constituting a significant quota of eligible voters in Nigeria. Nonetheless, the political topography of Nigeria remains male-centric and misogynistic. Ferrant (2011) submits that political power is akin to political representation. Nevertheless, gender advocates globally and in Nigeria often indulge in power relations, neglecting other aspects of politics. Since the return to democracy, in many circles, women have hardly added their voices to various issues of national concern.

A concluding remark at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, was the advancement of a strong case for improved political participation on behalf of women. It was agreed that more women should be involved in power and decision-making globally. Subsequently, the goal of academia, policymakers and other stakeholders has been to proffer a panacea that would mitigate the disparity between the roles of men and women in all ramifications of life (UN, 1995). The gap between males and females in the recent Nigerian scenario reflects asymmetrical differences where sexism and gender advocacy in politics have become pronounced. Therefore, this research focuses on boosting women's engagement in participatory politics for good governance and sustainable development. Paxton et al. (2019) observed that the female population is gaining momentum and relevance in domestic and national politics and the international political arena, though slightly above average. This suggests that women's numerical strength and potential needed for the nation's positive impact on economic, social and political development cannot be over-emphasised (Suleiman, 2017). The Gender Strategy Advancement International (GSAI, 2022) stated that 6.7% of Nigerian women were elected and appointed into various political offices nationally. This figure is said to be low when compared to the global average, which stood at 22.5%. In a similar vein, the African regional average was at 23.4%, while that of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was approximately an average of 15%. These statistics are not encouraging as they have dented Nigeria's image both regionally and continentally.

While the statistics above in contemporary society has generated many controversies unabatedly, liberal opinions perceive that an increase in women's engagement in the institution of democracy could foster good governance and sustainable development as yearned for in Nigerian multiparty democracy.

## Literature Review

Gender is seen as an exemplified social concept that includes biological and cultural attributes. The groupings of male and female and their proposed resolutions are pivotal and critical, existing as discourses at the centrality of gender issues (Jaramillo, 2013; Okafor et al., 2007; Randall, 2011; Di Salvo et al., 1988). Generally, gender issues revolve around the totality of the welfare of women and men daily. It also involves the state of relationship among varying opinions, the accessibility and use of available resources, actions and reactions, mediations and policies (politics). Gender issues expose abuse and intentional prejudice against the feminine gender. Severally, gender has been employed as a terminology, feminism has been primarily responsible for the interest in gender relations. Gender relations have been portrayed by feminists of all stripes as problems of oppression and inequality (Afshar, 2005). As such, gender parity is now widely acknowledged as an objective of (national) development (Ferrant, 2015).

Additionally, feminist scholars have ensured that gendered analysis is included in all development plans and projects, especially those in underdeveloped nations (Sarker, 2006). Ferry (2025) conceives gender as exceeding the division of the social world into two categories, despite the temptation to do so at times. It derives much meaning and support from traditional and cultural practices, ably fortified by sexual relations and identity politics founded on existing social beliefs in the society. Warden (2015) opined that these views and models in the present time are being exhibited through the lens of particular ideologies and lifestyles, which direct human behaviour and impede resultant responses. It also depicts the way and manner in which individuals conduct themselves to hold their culture in high esteem, thereby taking advantage of opportunities that come their way, to enjoy life to its fullest. As a result, differences are bound to emerge in the gender conundrum, making gender dynamics a topical issue. One of the most common trends is the idea of gender parity or equality, which is supported by democratic principles and is favoured by women (Idike et al., 2020). However, politics are necessary for gender parity because power struggles are at the heart of politics. Gender agitations are inseparable from power dynamics in democratic formations and their illustrative essentials, which are necessary ingredients for national growth. Thus, addressing gender issues emphasises why women are included in the definitions of democracy but are hardly captured in practice.

Ferguson (2024) affirmed that governance involves the use and benefits accruable from authority. It is the capacity of the state to utilise authority and the challenges arising from engaging in such activity. Thus, the two main components of governance are authority and responsibility. Farazmand (2020) suggest that governance involves financial muscle, physical and managerial proficiency, saddled with prompt and quality service delivery, the strength of its labour force, and the ease of executing budgets and decision-making. Nguyen (2016), adopting the 1991 World Bank Report, considers governance as the utilisation of power in regulating both economic and social resources with the aid of advancing growth and development. The components of governance consist of political top brass, civil service ability, exemplification and accountability, transparency, an impartial and independent judiciary implementing the constitution, and involvement. Nonetheless, good governance manages the progression of development, and the major factors which define good governance are the political will of politicians and their political power. The International Monetary Fund (2013), in its definition of good governance, clarifies that the rule of law, supervisory framework, and economic policies are generally under the ambit of governance. Governance has two major aspects: the selection of leaders and the management of public affairs. However, the onus still lies on the government to employ skilled manpower that will not only allocate resources but also formulate and implement effective policies. Governance deals with the process of decision-making involving those referred to as decision-makers, and it also implies the process of decision implementation by the relevant authority (Zulkifli et al, 2022).

Transparency, accountability, participation, and responsiveness are indispensable and credible tools for effective governance. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights defines governance as how resolutions are arrived at and carried executed or otherwise (UNESCAP, 2009). This definition explains the vital mechanisms of good governance in terms of the procedure of decision-making, how decisions are carried out, and the individuals concerned. Hence, good governance will underscore the involvement of women in senior management in public organisations. Sarri (2023) argues that independence, responsibility, membership

and inclusion are the constituents of good governance. This aligns with Lerner's (1986) opinion, which is premised on governance's vital characteristics, which include inclusivity, thus permitting important stakeholders to contribute positively to decision-making outcomes, making the society a better place for all to reside in. In any society, good governance advances the relevance of women in society, and women should be given sensitive positions in politics and key sectors of the economy. Participation guarantees that women are crucial to the decision-making process. So, good governance implies attempts at democratisation, with the conduct of free and fair elections, participatory and inclusive politics, the establishment of an autonomous civil society, and the respect for the constitution and the legal order. Good governance concerning civil rule denotes a democratically constituted governance within the confines of a defined democratic political framework and complementary resourceful administrative organisations, including tailor-made strategies, predominantly in the economic domain (Smith, 2007). In essence, good governance entails precise modifications that will improve the accountability of political elites towards the citizenry, promote regard for human rights, consolidate the rule of law and decentralise political power (Fuller, 2025). At the political and organisational level, three traits of good governance are visible with the governance agenda of most aid agencies: Political heterogeneity, prospects for broad involvement in politics, and honesty and integrity by those who are within the corridors of power (Shuvo, 2024).

Also, development as a multidimensional concept is a process that brings about fundamental and substantial societal changes. It encompasses and embraces such aspects of the equality of life as social justice, equality of opportunity for all citizens, equitable distribution of income, and democratisation in the development process (Ghaffari, Pirttikangas, & Gilman, 2025). Development is a progression of advancement that gives better meaning to life in different spheres: economic, governmental, political, social, traditional, and religious. This implies that development is not restricted. However, it is incorporating, better still, multi-faceted, based on the sides of the argument. Okafor et al. (2007) viewed development as a blend of explicit social change and better quality of life. Idike et al. (2020) and Oluwadele et al. (2023) emphasised that national development occurs in a nation-state, which indicates the welfare of a large chunk of the nationals of such a state materially. Ahmed (2007) also stated that human development is related to improving a particular civilisation's material, communal, and psychological circumstances. Sustainable development is all about the attainment of human rights and how to accomplish gender equality- the empowerment of all women and girls (Bala, 2024). Sustainable development integrates and balances humanity's economic, social, and environmental factors (male and female), which centres on the three dimensions of sustainable development (Saleh et al., 2024). Idris and Maikomo (2023) observe that sustainable development guarantees a complete absence of violence, insecurity and injustice against women, tantamount to inequality, corruption, and poor governance.

This study notes that gender issues in democratizing Nigeria all revolve around traditional, social, economic, and institutional reasons that have narrowed down the confines of women's societal abilities and participation in decision-making or leadership roles. More often, these issues raise questions over the dichotomy between genders that are not necessarily perceived in biological differences, but in social demand. Thus, the notion of equality or parity among genders must be addressed with concepts of democracy and development in modern times.

### 1. Theoretical Considerations: Feminism, Gender and Patriarchal Nigerian State

A plethora of literature describes feminism as egalitarianism for women or equal opportunities between males and females. Johnson (2021) perceives gender as the attributes of men and women, or boys and girls, constructed by society, but it is not determined or constructed biologically. Feminism focuses on creating a genderless society where one's sexual anatomy is unconnected to who one is. Conversely, gender is associated with masculine and feminine roles in society. Widely shared ideas and beliefs about how men and women are described in society are termed gender ideology. However, in the world, there is no universal gender ideology. Gender beliefs result from socialisation (Wade & Ferree, 2015). Someone's recognition of gender will depend on what type of socialisation happens in his or her society. The question is, is gender flexible? This question raises why it is somewhat unusual for the gender binary to require all bodies to fit into only two gender

categories. Mensah (2023) also comments that the human sex body is natural, but having various gender ideologies makes humans interpret feelings and human bodies differently (Wade & Ferree, 2015). The ideologies do not justify that men and women are opposite. Men and women act differently, though, according to their different ideologies. Therefore, the gender binary defines it all clearly that there are two different types of people, the masculine being males and the feminine being females. Part of what gave rise to feminism is overcoming the incapacity to think that they are strong, angry, dangerous, and loud. Self-defence instructors often tell women who think they are helpless to defend themselves against a man. The term 'gender' as a concept had already put women on the weaker side. However, in modern society, formality requires gender equality to treat men and women equally under the law. This restricts much action for both men and women and tends towards balanced or gendered sensitivity in many ramifications.

Feminism portends that women possess more privilege than men to enjoy the masculine and feminine classified parts of life. This liberty gives women many exciting opportunities and effortless pleasures. When being a woman gets dangerous, feminism offers both women and girls a chance to fight back (Wade & Ferree, 2015). Even though women have choices concerning how to do femininity and alternatives for blending masculinity, women are still subject to control and limitations in gender presentations. Resultantly, like men, women negotiate with men in male-dominated societies in a bid to boost their freedom, security, and comfort in the face of discrimination. In every society, gender roles also teach people how to behave as a man or a woman. These rules are timeless, but they keep changing. The rules bring about different actions in both men and women, as most are habitual, pleasurable, and observable. The orientation of those who carry out research in related areas emphasises that feminism is always uncertain because they can never say how much reward men give and under what conditions. Feminism depends on men's ongoing willingness to support the course even as their positions decrease in value (Peterson, 2021).

Besides supporting the intersectional study, feminists have been on the frontline of proposing masculinity and how the gender binary might pose disadvantages to their male counterparts. Today, several men identify as feminist or pro-feminist and have joined the crusade by forming feminist organisations fighting gender imbalances and their dangerous effects on women and men. Gender inequalities always direct men and women, while feminism tries to redirect these inequalities toward equality. In patriarchal societies, women have no rights over their bodies and the children they raise. Patriarchy permits men to take actions, such as deciding where the family lives. However, the feminist movement has established a new outlook on modern society. Jaiyeola (2020) notes that contemporary gender relations are not absolute for women either; feminist institutions are more relevant to women today as traditional gender institutions are too patriarchal. Institutions give men and women constant social interaction to meet society's needs. Institutions widely create norms that are followed and culturally approved (Wade & Ferree, 2015). It powerfully enables and constrains our lives, and there is no opting out. In gender institutions, men and women are valued differently, and in feminist institutions, men and women are equal. When people recognise that some institutions are central to their daily lives and strongly gendered or feminine, they will determine many relationships between men and women.

Tlaiss and Khanin (2023) noted that feminism and gender are all about power; to do femininity is to do courtesy, and to do courtesy is to do femininity. Also, Muraina and Ajímátanraeję (2023) claimed that no gender is morally superior and entitled to all the world's benefits, including the monopoly of power. There is no superpower to claim superiority, and even proof that God desired such a status to exist. Besides, no biological trait is much stronger than the other; however, everything falls to nature, and nature is putting one gender on top of the other. In many ways, women's daily lives are less repressed than men's.

The visible male-dominated style of customary Nigerian society, which had already provided room for men to rule over and control women, has negatively affected the presence and mainstreaming of women in political and influential positions (John & Akpan, 2024). The tendency to consolidate democracy and deepen development may be hampered as patriarchal traditions shape social references between genders. Patriarchy holds sway in Nigeria, as in other African countries, that it dictates sexual roles to secular things and governance. Patriarchy highly promotes a structure of social classification and separation, mainly based on sex, which places males in beneficial positions while concurrently relegating female roles to the background

and placing particular restrictions on them. This is a pattern of social relations that empowers men to control women (Mattison et al., 2023; Frazer, 2023). A common trait in patriarchal societies is the enforcement and approval of misogynistic rules that set women backwards in every sector of the community, allowing for the prevalence of domestic and sexual violence, lesser remuneration for the same job description, heritage rights, and lawful adulthood. Religion, customs and culture have greatly influenced interactions between men and women for ages and imposed male supremacy into the web of the social structure and institutions at every level of leadership. The exclusion of women is further buttressed by patriarchy, and it is evident in many spheres of life like education, economy, labour market, politics, business, family, domestic matters and inheritance. Grabowska (2023) and Sinha (2020) aver that the political disparities between liberty and domination are the outcome of the masculine-feminine dichotomy. However, on the contrary, feminism censures each policy, comprising all the social methods responsible for the replication and exercise of male dominance over women. Feminist theory argues that patriarchy is a social concept which can be subdued by disclosing and seriously scrutinising its manifestations (Makama, 2013).

Feminism overemphasises the repudiation of women's persecution and a promise to deliver women from different manifestations of harassment. The thread is premised upon the conviction that women are greatly treasured by men in their relationships and are not inferior to them in any way. Academics in this era have constructed varying types of theories on feminism, such as Social Feminism, Liberal Feminism, Socialist Feminism, Radical Feminism, Cultural Feminism, African feminism, Third-Wave Feminism, and the like. It is essentially dependent on various admiration for women's encounters, identities, understanding and strengths, and is determined to enable all women to attain their full rights (Degani, 2024).

## Methodology

This study relied on content analysis under the ambit of qualitative research methods. Content analysis is tied to the organised reading of a body of texts, literature, journals, online resources and other sources. A major feature that differentiates content analysis from other kinds of social science research is that it data collection from people is discarded. Similar to documentary research, content analysis deals with the study of documented information, or recorded information found in texts, media, or physical articles (Bello & Yakubu, 2018). The data used for this research were obtained from secondary data sources such as journals, books and historical and archival documents, both on the internet and in libraries. Data was analysed using the content analysis technique. Secondary data was obtained by carefully selecting writings from gender disparities, governance, sustainable development, political participation and feminism. Data was assessed based on women's participation in politics, the patriarchal nature of Nigeria, best practices on the African continent, the national gender policy in Nigeria, and heightened women's agenda in democracy. The study sought to examine the policy framework and the intention of government institutions to address gender bias in Nigeria's political system. A thorough document analysis was carried out by the research objective, which was to investigate the intention of government institutions to address gender bias in positioning Nigeria's democracy for good governance and sustainable development.

## The Findings

### 1. Gendered Disparities in Nigerian Polls

In reality, the Nigerian National Gender Policy (NGP) even suggested 35 per cent affirmative action for the inclusivity of more women, either voted for or politically appointed and placed in sensitive offices (Oloyede, 2015), representing 5 per cent above the Beijing recommendation. But, in retrospect, Nigeria is far from attaining this because the percentage of seats held by women in the Nigerian government is not close to half of the proposed percentage. The disadvantaged position and poor participation of women in politics have generated a massive void between the genders. During the 2015 general elections, of the 747 senatorial aspirants, only 122 were women, depicting 16.3% of the entire contenders selected by political parties. Also, 267 women vied for seats in the lower chamber out of a total of 1,775, accounting for a paltry 15.1%. A total of 389 women contested for seats at the upper and lower chambers. An aggregate of 29 women won seats: 7

of them proceeded to the Senate and 22 headed to the House of Representatives. The 2019 elections saw 235 women (12.3%) competing for Senatorial seats; of the 4,680 aspirants, 533 were females, contesting for seats in the House of Representatives, just 11.4%. Though the population of female candidates was almost double, just 8 women won Senatorial elections. About 47.1% of the 84 million registered voters during the 2019 general elections were women. The Inter-Parliamentary Union's statistics released in 2021 indicated that globally, Nigeria occupied the 184<sup>th</sup> position among 190 nations in terms of female political representation (CDD, 2022).

Table 1. Figures and Percentages Showing Nigerian Women in Elective Positions between 1999 and 2023

	President		Governors		Senate		House of Representatives	
1999	Nil	0.0%	Nil	0.0%	3	2.8%	12	3.3%
2003	Nil	0.0%	Nil	0.0%	4	3.7%	21	5.8%
2007	Nil	0.0%	Nil	0.0%	9	8.3%	25	6.9%
2011	Nil	0.0%	Nil	0.0%	7	6.4%	26	7.2%
2015	Nil	0.0%	Nil	0.0%	7	6.4%	22	6.1%
2019	Nil	0.0%	Nil	0.0%	8	7.3%	13	3.6%
2023	Nil	0.0%	Nil	0.0%	3	3.4%	15	5.2%

Source: Researchers (2024)

This table illustrates gender inequality and the unabating dominance of men in the political sphere and decision-making opportunities, as the elections conducted since the start of the Fourth Republic on May 29, 1999 (see Table 1.1) have revealed a need for more efforts on women's political participation for inclusive democratic government in Nigeria. Thus far, women are hardly considered candidates for political seats and have barely won elections in Nigeria. Against these gaps, this study conceives of Nigeria's democracy experiencing a political upturn in gender issues reconsideration and development for engendering space for gender parity for women's empowerment.

## 2. Increasing Women's Agenda in Democracy

Adekanye (2024) opined that the protracted democratisation began in 1999 after a long period of military usurpation of power. Chukwudi et al. (2024) argued that this move was supposedly meant to create participatory opportunities for women and mobilise their continuing and inclusive interests among policy-making entities. However, the socio-cultural backgrounds and institutional levels vis-à-vis the electoral management bodies (INEC and the Legislature), party organisations, and other frameworks made participatory democratisation unwelcoming to women. For instance, INEC, with its gender policy, has not successfully mainstreamed sizeable or proportional numbers of women into politics since 2006. At the onset of the democratic experimentation of Nigeria in the Fourth Republic, there seemed to be a growth of policies and programs recognising women alongside men to rebuild a stable, nascent democracy (Abdulrasheed, 2022). President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration (1999-2007) strove to remove gender misrepresentation in the polity of the Nigerian state with recognition of the high population of Nigerian women, which has been reflected in an increase in women's representation and appointment into political and public offices by the administration (Luka, 2011).

Maushe et al. (2025) assert that in the last two decades, the representation of women in parliaments across Africa has increased positively, although it remains skewed. Going back to 2022, women occupy an average of 24% of parliamentary seats on the continent. Globally, Rwanda is at the summit, accounting for a whopping 61% female representation, which further affirms the fulfilment of constitutional restructurings and gender quotas. Additionally, Senegal, South Africa, and Namibia have made significant strides, with the proportion of women in legislatures reaching over 40%. However, Nigeria accounts for a paltry 7 % of women in the parliament, exhibiting innate obstacles both culturally and institutionally. Anomalies of this nature call for urgent, targeted and well-tailored policies to mitigate gender inequality in governance.

## Discussion

Udu, Uwadiegwu, & Eseni (2023) submit that, regardless of the United Nations' (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) on equality of rights for everyone, women were still deprived of equal representation and popular political participation. However, the participation of Nigeria in women-related progressive activities of the United Nations became more pronounced in 1975 when the UNO proclaimed by declaring that year as the International Year of Women. Afterwards, the UN set aside March 8th of every year to celebrate International Women's Day. In the seventh month of 1980, all countries agreed and decided that each member state must note the urgent need for the engagement of women in nation-building, which should culminate in the inclusion of women in decision-making and leadership positions. Ugwu (2018) noted that the Lagos Plan of Action advocated for the active participation of women in politics, which was the joint agreement of all African Heads of State and Governments in a meeting convened in Lagos in April 1980. The meeting concluded that African states should formulate plans and approaches for women's active involvement in politics and all other related undertakings.

Not long afterwards, Nigeria responded by setting up the National Committee on Women Development (NCWD) and the establishment of corresponding committees in 21 states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria federation saddled with the responsibility of promoting awareness of women. Consequently, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) signed and endorsed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2009. Resultantly, the UN joined and teamed up with the ECOWAS and its agencies to drive the convention and ensure total compliance to guarantee African countries that women are suitably represented in politics, access to qualitative health care, appropriate education and access to credit and loan schemes. However, different government agencies have tried to resolve the issue of poor participation of women in politics. For example, positive steps were taken to create the Women's Political Empowerment Office and the Nigerian Women's Trust Fund. The electoral umpire, the INEC gender policy, the nationwide multi-stakeholder conversation, the introduction of numerous mediations to realize confirmatory action or gender rule quota system, and the assembling of the Nigerian Women Strategy Conference are among political institutions propelled to look at gender balancing issues in Nigeria afterwards (Ette, & Akpan-Obong, 2023).

Therefore, to engage women in good governance and sustain their prospects for development in Nigeria, their social, economic, and political empowerment in democratizing Nigeria must remain the bedrock for governance. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) notes that accomplishing the target of equality about females and males partaking in decision-making gives an equilibrium which projects a more detailed structure of society and is vital to building a strong democracy and enhancing its smooth running (UNECA, 1998). The role of women in politics and decision-making cannot be underestimated. Hence, they contribute significantly to the reevaluation of political ideals and priorities, bringing new ideas to the table to challenge existing political agendas and create new ones that suit contemporary women's issues, such as gender-based matters, standards, and skills. The absence of active female participation and subsequent fusion of their perceptions at all decision-making levels will stall their advancement. Hence, equality, development, and peace would still be mere rhetoric and a mirage.

Reconciling every issue about gender disparity at this point in the Nigerian political trajectory requires that there be a quota system based on the population figures of males to females. This can serve as a mechanism to dictate equal or balanced proportional participation and representation in the Nigerian political system and carve niches for the spate of women in leadership. This study suggests that women's numbers estimated to be above or at an average level of the total population can salvage the disparity and inequality that keeps women at a disadvantage, as well as stifle their human development prospects in society. While a disproportionate number of men and women in a democracy believe that justice is not being served to women for equal representation, the universal human rights call for repositioning to democratize Nigeria's political climate. Based on this study, social and economic disparities along gender lines continue to be rooted in the prevalence of gender inequality domiciled in Nigeria's art of governance since the establishment of the current republic. Secondly, women's empowerment can be revolutionised for Nigerian political development with increasing yearning for Western cultures and education, in which Nigerian women have recently swept every profession.



As established above, women in Nigeria have been underrepresented in public spaces since Nigeria attained emancipation from its colonial masters. The showcasing of women's managerial proficiencies in all walks of life aptly suggests the urgency of involving women in the fabric of the polity through active engagement in public affairs, especially assigning leadership roles to them (Rahman & Anindita, 2024).

Thirdly, contemporary academic works, literature, and studies should be encouraged and geared towards furthering discussion on gender-related topics to raise the potential and development of women in governance and leadership positions. Research studies and consistent academic interest can be encouraged to expand feminist studies' focus as scholars postulate theoretical spheres for feminist studies. On a global scale, Nigeria is not faring well in terms of gender balancing and mainstreaming because women have not been accepted and integrated into the gender equality discourse. Consequently, power restructuring between genders should be escalated and resolved without any further delay.

### **Conclusion**

Amidst the patriarchal nature of the political system, the background bequeathed to Nigeria at independence by British imperial colonialism, women can still lead key political initiatives and promote good governance for development. Over the years, women have strived through all facets of life to be empowered and gain political relevance and recognition that can make canvassing for leadership positions possible. The previous usurpation of political power by men in uniforms, perceived as an aberration, can be alleged as the base of women's second-fiddle status in Nigerian politics, which this study aims to address for gendered balance in social, economic and political development. Women in Nigeria, unlike in advanced and developed democracies, are politically disempowered, highly marginalised and democratically irrelevant, thus hindering national development. This does not align with SDG number five, which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Manning (2023) avers that civil society plays a formidable role in coalition with governmental platforms for women to harness the gains of multi-party systems, monitor human rights, challenge all forms of corruption, inspire grassroots formations and massively support legislation. In conclusion, gender equality can promote transparency in governance as gender-lens parity can engender transparency, propel peace, and advance the development of the polity. The experience in the political environment thus far shows that the non-violent nature of women and their dispute-resolution attributes can translate a man's sagacious political environment into a peaceful and serene experience devoid of corruption. The study, however, assumes that civil societies and other non-governmental organisations can promote gender equity for good governance through women's empowerment programmes. Democracy demands two ways to participate in politics. Gender rules for equity in affairs of the state, therefore, should be adhered to. Also, the legal framework that will ultimately represent the rule of law by ensuring impartiality in balanced-gendered manning of the decision-making process in governance can be re-addressed.

Again, in a political system devoid of the true principle of representative government but with continuous yearning for good governance and other paraphernalia of true democracy like Nigeria, governance should be characterised by the active engagement of all citizens and women in decision-making since participation is crucial to democratic principle and a solid requirement for its operation. This, however, suggests further studies on women's participation in politics.

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