

RIGHTS OF WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE IN ELECTIONS VIS-À-VIS THE ELECTORAL ACT 2022: MYTH AND REALITY*

Abstract

The bane and clog in the wheel of women socio-political and socio-economic development had surfaced since antiquity of patriarchal hegemony. Even as organization and government of human society has been bedeviled with series of transformations and much now is the democratic setting, the problem subsists. The prospect is believed to have anchorage on women's engagement in government leadership through the electoral process. However, the prospect is short-lived with a less viable electoral law in addressing women's participation in the electoral process. Stakeholders from different quarters have identified the loopholes in the electoral laws and espoused the call for amendment, just like the case of the recent electoral law amendment. However, unsolved puzzle is whether the new electoral law would address this problem of poor women participation in the electoral process. Therefore, the broad aim of this study was to examine the rights of women to participate in elections vis-à-vis the new Electoral Act based on the myth and reality. The main sources of data collection were various legal documents and materials, both from the library and internet. The finding of the study, among others, was that the new electoral law, though in perspective, has not made any remarkable input to the perennial agitations of women for effective and increase participation in elections. Recommendations followed, among others, that obnoxious legislation, judicial decisions reached per incuriam, and customary law repugnant to natural justice should be manifestly jettisoned and a new course of action and approach be taken to effectively combat women's challenges in politics and practically integrate them accordingly. It was concluded that women on their own should play their roles with all sincerity of purpose and they should be able to give good and qualitative leadership when called upon to take positions of power just like they are expected to do in the home front. Finally, this study was not just significant to scholars of jurisprudence, feminism and human rights, but also to legal practitioners, politicians and socio-political scientists, as well as the judges/justices in any case relating to women electoral rights.

Keywords: Myth, Bases, Realities, Challenges, Rights of Women, Participation, Elections, Electoral Laws, Bill, Electoral Act.

1. Introduction

The bases, realities, and challenges to the rights of women to participate in elections under the Nigerian electoral law are multifaceted, even more obvious when men debate and legislate on matters concerning the advancement and social welfare of women and girls. For instance, in March, 2016, a female Senator for Ekiti South, named Abiodun Olujimi, sponsored a bill seeking gender equality and empowerment of women, the safeguard of land rights of women, discrimination in education and employment of women, and a stop to gender-based violence. However, the bill, 'Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill' was subjected to intense debate by the Senate which is dominated by male Senators and the bill was thrown out for lacking in merit.¹ This makes the problem of women self-determination a perennial affront to Nigerian democracy which the succeeding electoral laws have done less to ameliorate the quagmire. Idyllically, women have the right to participate in the demeanor of public affairs, either directly or through liberally elected representatives. The franchise right to vote and to be voted for or elected to any level of government offices, or to be a member of any political organization, labor unions, employers or professional associations of their choice is a universal adult suffrage. In other words, it is not intended to be a minus for the women. In fact, the number of women in decision making and leadership roles has significantly improved around the globe.² Consequently, civil society organizations, feminist advocates, and other stakeholders have leverage on the international best practices to clamour for increased representation of women in political processes in Nigeria. Sequel to these backdrops, every electoral law amendment and reform expects a lot of padding towards committed attention to women interest and increased number in the electoral process. Though these expectations meet conspicuous confrontations and disappointments, there is no retreat in still pushing on at every available opportunity. There may be no framework provided for it, but the expectations are for committed efforts to be made and felt. These associated salient issues make it adroit imperative to explore the extent to which the electoral laws, past and present, as well as the new Electoral Act have impacted in addressing the rights of women to participate in elections beyond the myth to reality.

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¹ Sahara Reporters, *Online Database* <<http://saharareporters.com/2018/03/09/nigerian-lawmaker-argues-against-giving-women-more-political-opportunities>> accessed on 25th January, 2022.

² Negash, K. *Advancement of Women: The 67th United Nations General Assembly*. (New York, 2012)

2. Nature and Bases of Women Participation in Elections

The world of politics has for a long time been regarded as a place reserved for men. However today, there is a growing agitation for doors to open for women in politics. Today, democracy is the order of the day, various countries are working towards women’s participation and representation in politics, even their inclusion in areas of decision making in governance. Nigerian women constitute about half of the population of the country and are known to play vital roles as mothers, producers, time managers, community organizers, as well as social and political activists. But despite the major roles they play and their population, they are yet to achieve equality between men and women. The Beijing Conference requires every country that participated in the conference to reserve 35 percent of positions and offices to women but in Nigeria we are yet to attain it. Women are marginalized in politics because of social, cultural, and religious factors. Nigeria politics is capital intensive and many women in Nigeria are not as economically empowered as men. The government is expected to show their commitments by endorsing, adapting and domesticating the International and Regional Human Rights instruments. There is also the high level of expectations on the Nigerian government in promoting affirmative action to develop a great mass of women in critical leadership positions, and setting up a central fund to assist them in aspiring for political offices. It is a worthwhile task to review and challenge the electoral processes which are propellers to discriminatory practices. There is a collective responsibility on the side of the civil society which requires supporting women in public leadership through active women’s movement for technical support and information solidarity. The economic sector is also a bane in ensuring economic empowerment of women. These malaises are also rooted in the prerequisite task of changing the patriarchal hegemony involving oppressive traditional and cultural practices, and as well challenging corruption and promoting a culture of peace and non-violence in all areas of women political involvement.³It is clear that women are very much under-represented in issues that affect their lives. Their voices are yet to be heard and are yet to take their rightful place in politics. It is undeniable that different factors have contributed to the relegation of women to the background in Nigerian politics.

Table 1: Women Elected to Nigeria Political Offices from 1999 to 2011⁴

Offices	Seats Available	1999	2003	2007	2011
		Women	Women	Women	Women
President	1	0	0	0	0
Senate	109	3	4	9	7
Fed. House of Rep.	360	7	21	27	19
Governor	36	0	0	0	0
States House of Assembly	990	24	40	57	69
LGA chairpersons	710	13	15	27	nil
Councilors	6368	69	267	235	nil

Table 2: Participations in Nigeria Elections in April, 2011⁵

Offices Contested	Gender Difference in the Election				Total
	Females		Males		
	Candidates	Winning	Male Candidates	Winning	
President	1	Nil	19	1	20
Vice President	3	Nil	17	1	20
Governor	13	Nil	340	36	353
Deputy Governor	58	1	289	35	347
States House of Assembly	220	19	2,188	341	2,408
Senatorial	90	17	800	102	890

Table 3: Comparison of Women Representation in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2015 General Elections⁶

³T Salaam ‘Democratic Socialist Movement for Struggle, Solidarity and Socialism in Nigeria’ *Online Database*<<http://www.socialistnigers.org/women/1-3-03.html>> accessed on 25th January 2022.

⁴Facts and Figures on Women’s Participation in Politics, Governance, and Decision-Making, *Online Women in Politics*<<http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/statistics.htm>> accessed on 12th February, 2022.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶D Oladoye ‘In Retrospective: 2011 April polls and Gender Ranking in Nigeria’ *Online Database*<<http://agora.nigeriaelections.org/readmore/22/2011/05/77>> accessed on 24th January, 2022; M Omolara,

‘Participation in the 2015’ *General: Fault Lines and Mainstreaming Exclusion* (N.P., 2015); H Sogbesan, ‘Analysis: 2015 Elections hold no Promise for Improved Women Representation in Nigeria’ *Online*

S/N	ELECTED OFFICES	No. of Avail. seats	No.& % of women elected in 1999	No.& % of women elected in 2003	No.& % of women elected in 2007	No.& % of women elected in 2011	No.& % of women elected in 2015
1	President	1	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2	Senate	109	3(2.8%)	4(3.7%)	9(8.3%)	7.6 (42%)	8(7%)
3	House of Reps	360	12(3.3%)	21(5.8%)	26(7.2%)	25(6.9%)	19(-)
4	Governorship	36	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
5	Deputy Governor	36	0 (0%)	2(5.8%)	6(16.7%)	1(0.28%)	4(-)
6	States House of Assembly	990	12(1.2%)	38(3.84%)	53(5.35%)	18(1.82%)	N/A

3. The Myths to Women Participation in Politics

Lack of Public Acceptance

One possible explanation for women's under representation in politics is lack of public acceptance of women in politics. Attitude of the public towards women is part of the reason few women participate actively in politics. Public attitude does not only determine how many female candidates win a general election but also directly or indirectly determine how many are considered and nominated for the office. Women who are actively participating in politics are not publicly accepted because they are seen and treated as free women (sexually loosed or wayward) of easy virtues, stubborn people, whores, too domineering, and culturally rebellious etcetera. It is observed that during political campaigns, the political opponents (mostly men) used the alleged moral standing of these women against them and often insult them directly in public. Some of these women are often exposed to public shame and are socially stigmatized by both men and women. The use of negative labeling, derogatory names, abusive languages and expressions to describe women poses a big challenge to women in politics.⁷

Socio-Cultural Practices

The entrenched socio-cultural practices in the Nigeria society prevail in favour of men against women. Women are often not permitted to involve in public life from childhood via adulthood by authority figures such as husband, fathers, mothers and other relations due to cultural image of a virtuous woman defined as quiet, submissive, docility who should be seen not heard because of the patriarchal nature of the Nigeria society. Most Nigerians including women still believe and embrace the traditional perspectives that view women as inferior to men, second-class citizens, weaker sex, child bearers, primary care givers, and so on. Most times, they feel the game of politics is exclusive to men and women who dare venture into it and those who struggle to venture are usually contented with back seat. Many women psychologically acknowledged and perceive the social stigma that politics is a 'dirty game' and as such tend to wrongly perceive few women that participate in politics as arrogant and irresponsible and the society will do anything to pull them down.⁸

Inadequate Education

The lack of education and exposure among majority of the women folk in relation to the requirements or demands of political leadership is a problem incidental to women's participation in politics. As a result of low education and professional attainment, they are poorly equipped mentally to venture into the male-dominated world of

Database<www.premiumtimesang.com/features-and-int> accessed on 12th November, 2015; I Eme, 'An Analysis of Nigerian Women's Score Card in 2015 Polls' *Online Database*<[www.singaporeanjbem.com/pdfs/sg-vol4\(4\)/2.pdf](http://www.singaporeanjbem.com/pdfs/sg-vol4(4)/2.pdf)> accessed on 17th November, 2015; N E Akpan, 'Men With Out Women: An Analysis of the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria' *Online Database*<www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/20> accessed on 13th November, 2015. As was cited in PC Iloka, 'Political Participation of Women in Nigeria: A Legal Overview' [2021] (9) (3) *International Journal of Business and Law Research* 174.

⁷ P C Iloka, 'Political Participation of Women in Nigeria: A Legal Overview' [2021] (9) (3) *International Journal of Business and Law Research* 174.

⁸ Facts and Figures on Women's Participation in Politics, Governance, and Decision-Making, *Online Women in Politics*<<http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/statistics.htm>> accessed on 12th February, 2022.

politics. Owing to lack of education, professional ability and poor leadership skills, the Nigerian women lack self-confidence, courage, audacity, will power, and boldness required to aim for the highest post in political arena.

Unhealthy Political Environment

This is another challenge to women's active participation. The political terrain is a do-or-die affair and fraught with violence, maiming, assassination, threats, blackmail, intimidation, humiliation, etcetera which are utilized by most men to scare women away from active participation in politics. Moreover, involvement of thugs during and after elections and the attendant insecurity such as destruction of lives and properties, fear of unknown gun men that characterized a typical electoral process in Nigeria makes politics something scaring for women.

Religion

Religious practices are also used as powerful instruments of stereotype against Nigerian women in their political aspirations and active participations in politics. The Purdah system (that is house seclusion of women) of the Islamic doctrine strictly bars women from participating in politics.⁹

Right of Inheritance

Traditionally, the patrilineal Nigerian society excludes women from ownership of landed property¹⁰. The principle of male superiority is apparent in Nigeria; generally, women in Nigeria have no right of inheritance over the property of a deceased relative, particularly in the South Eastern part of Nigeria. The issues are apparent in the case of *Muojekwu v Muojekwu*¹¹. However the situation is changing as held in *Muojekwu v Iwuchukwu*¹² and *Asika v Atuanya*¹³. In *Asika's* case, the court upheld the provisions of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended), specifically sections 42 and 43.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the customary inhibition of any class of females to access and/or acquire land by way of rights to inheritance or succession is detrimental to development of any nation¹⁴. The female should have right of disposal of any property inherited as was held in the Tanzanian case of *Ephraim v Pastory & Anor*¹⁵ that a woman has a right to any parcel of land inherited by her to transfer in commercial transaction. Men who inherited clan land sell same as and when necessary. The effect of denial of land to the women folk can be economic, social and psychological. Women are responsible for most food production in developing countries. There is stark poverty in the country especially amongst the females. Many women suffer psychologically due to the non-recognition of women's rights to land by most customs. It breeds insecurity among women and exposes them to self-pity and lack of confidence, and frustrations and this in effect affect their political ambition and participation, because political campaigns are highly monetized. In *Nezianya v Okagbue*¹⁶ the court held that a widow cannot appropriate her deceased husband's property without the permission of male members of her deceased husband's family. That she has only possessory right to the property. That her female children were not entitled to the said landed property of their deceased father. Just on the same vein in *Akinnubi v Akinnubi*¹⁷ the Supreme Court reiterated that it is the custom of most traditions in Nigeria, that a widow is also a chattel (part of her deceased husband's property) to be inherited by her deceased husband's male relatives.

Male Dominated Political Party

Women mostly play 'cheerleader role' in politics. Women are the enthusiastic supporters. Most women merely were content to cheer contestants of the opposite sex to victory. Women need to redefine their role in the polity, women are being used for electoral campaigns, they sing praises of men and when the men got elected, they forget that these women have a role to play in their policy formation. The biggest challenge of women in politics and in intra party elections is the domineering and want-to-be-the-head nature of men, they hardly give room for women to participate. This can be a big discouragement to women.¹⁸ Our Electoral Act needs urgent amendment to reserve

⁹'Gender Mainstreaming: Competitiveness and Growth, Nordic Council of Ministers November 23-24, 2000' *Online Database* <[http://216.239.37.104/search?q/XGOECD,=cache:D2r6wRf...](http://216.239.37.104/search?q=XGOECD,=cache:D2r6wRf...)> accessed on 12th February, 2022.

¹⁰M Oekalago, 'Nigerian NewsBBC' *Online Database* <[Htt/newsbbco.ukin/programmes](http://newsbbco.ukin/programmes)> accessed on 24th January, 2022. Also see: Section 43 of the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999* (as amended); *Married Women's Property Act, 1882* (an Act of British Parliament that is a statute of general application in Nigeria); Article 17 of UDHR; Article 17 of ACHPR; *Married Women Property Law of Western Region of Nigeria 1999*; as well as S. 4(a), 4(3) of *Widows and Widowers (Prohibition) Law, 2005*.

¹¹*Muojekwu v Muojekwu* (1997) 5 NWLR (pt. 567) p. 208.

¹²*Muojekwu v Iwuchukwu* (2004) 1 NWLR (pt. 883) p. 190 (103).

¹³*Asika v Atuanya* (2008) 17 NWLR (pt. 117) .

¹⁴ O Ikpeze, *Gender Dynamics of Inheritance Rights in Nigeria* (Folmech Printing Pub. Co Ltd, 2009) p. 95.

¹⁵*Ephraim v Pastory & Anor* (1993) LRC 231.

¹⁶*Nezianya v Okagbue*

¹⁷*Akinnubi v Akinnubi* (1963) 1 ALL NLR 352.

¹⁸ (n2)

at least fifty percent of political seats and appointment to women. Our male- biased world creates a barrier to women participation, for instance in politics, Nigeria women are under-represented in the political, economic and social spheres of national life. In the political terrain women are both under represented and misrepresented. Men create unnecessary hurdles, purposely to make life difficult, if not impossible, for women. Women politicians are often looked upon as prostitutes. Political meetings hardly commence before 12 midnight just as to deter women from attending such meetings.

Lack of Support from Fellow Women

Jealousy and envy among women are manifested in the way women condemn female politicians by calling them names and assassinate their character. Women need to support one another and work together to achieve collective empowerment in the face of a male- dominated society. The women should unlearn all the negative ideologies they have unconsciously imbibed from the societal values through their upbringing in a male dominated society. Some women have been made to be haters of one another and they do not know that they are fearfully and wonderfully made and they underrate the capability and leadership potentials they possess.

Lack of Fund

Politics in Nigeria especially seeking elective position is expensive requiring huge financial involvement and solid financial backing. Generally, the relatively pathetic poor financial disposition of most women is a critical challenge which mostly accounts for poor participation in politics and political defeats in elections. In spite of concession granted by some major political parties which lowers the cost of obtaining party nomination forms for women into elective office, the prize of achieving electoral goals is still farfetched from the reach of most esteemed women in the absence of ‘a godfather’ who foots the bill in exchange for unlimited favour when the seat is eventually secured. Considering financial backing, the godfathers and other financiers of politicians in Nigeria prefer male political aspirants to female ones based on the societal value assumption and political activities are masculine and male candidates are believed to stand a better chance of winning elections. The physical difference between men and women gives a high plausible explanation to male domination even in politics. Men are physically heavier, taller and stronger than women to mandate their will via violence. Women, on the other hand, are vulnerable because of their role in child bearing and nursing. In addition, discrimination and subjugation of women are further enforced by custom, traditional practices, beliefs, and the laws are some of the factors militating against the female gender.¹⁹

4. Prospects for Women in the Successive Electoral Reforms: Towards the Reality

Historical examination of successive constitutions and successive electoral laws and processes in Nigeria are irrefutably gender insensitive. Right from 1922 Clifford Constitution, being the first Constitution in Nigeria to the 1999 constitution, prospects and concerns of women, who represent majority of the population, have been undisputedly superfluous.²⁰ Nonetheless, since the resettlement of civilian rule in 1999, there are some sorts of momentums to front constitutional and electoral reforms. This development has also braved the female sex in the country with a number of civil societies’ movements towards the electoral and constitutional reform seminars. For instance, in October 1999, the first Presidential Committee was inaugurated to do a comprehensive constitutional and electoral review. The committee was constituted of twenty-four members, out of which four were women. Therefore, the report submitted by the committee had some gender friendly provisions. These include a proposal that the Federal Character Commission be replaced with Equal Opportunities Commission with a more expanded and inclusive mandate. It also proposed that women should have a choice in claiming their own state of origin or their husband’s in political arrangements, the third major amendment proposed by the committee was the substitution of the word ‘sex’ as it refers to the feminine in the Constitution with the word ‘gender’. However, these laudable recommendations thereafter became a utopia to the very government that set it up and the successive governments, thus jettisoned.²¹ Upon the return of the same government in 2003, a National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) was inaugurated in 2005, to address the challenges of Nigeria’s political system. There were only 30 women out of about 400 delegates. Notwithstanding the apparent gender gaps in representation of women, the NPRC ominously mainstreamed gender questions in its final report. This endeavor at electoral reform also was deuced and duntrodden.

In fact, in 2007 elections, Nigeria had no viable constitution and she used a weak electoral law adopted in 2006. It was far and wide admitted that the 2007 elections were awash with electoral irregularities and malpractices, and various degrees of disruptions and violence, also women’s plights were unaddressed. Sequel to these, Electoral

¹⁹J Ezeilo, ‘Gender, Constitutionalism and Electoral Reforms in Nigeria’ *A Working Paper Series for Gender and Constitutional Reform Network* (GECORN, 2009).

²⁰C R Bello, *Women and Political Participation* (A WHRnet Publication, 2003). Also available on <http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/beijing12/03_1201_wip.html> accessed on 12th February, 2022.

²¹*Ibid.*

Reform Committee (ERC) was inaugurated by the late President, Alhaji Umaru Yar' Adua on August 28, 2007 with the task to review and safeguard standard general elections which would ameliorate some of the germane issues of Nigeria's electoral democracy. Justice Muhammed Bello Uwais (CJN retired) headed the committee; he went round the country taking memoranda and oral presentations from Nigerians. The committee also met several women groups agitating for the inclusion of women issues and trepidations in the recommendation of the committee presented to the government. The committee's recommendation has been adjudged as one of the best in the history of constitutional and electoral reforms in Nigeria.²² Among the efforts of the committee in her report was a practical acknowledgment of the voices of women and their agitations for gender democracy and gender sensitivity. For example:

(i) on the composition of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC): it recommended that the Chairman and the Deputy should not be of the same gender and out of 6 geo-graphical representations 2 must be women. In addition, there should be a woman representative from the women's organization. ii) On political parties' registration and regulatory Commission, the ERC recommended that 2 out of 6 persons from the geo-political zonal representatives must be women. It also recommended further that the political associations should maintain 20% women in the membership of its governing bodies. iii) On enhancing internal democracy in the political parties: the ERC recommended that political parties should give more attention to the nomination of women and youths as candidates and ensure that women have equal access to leadership opportunities within party organizations. The report also recommended that political parties shall nominate for the proportional representation at least 30% female candidates and 2% physically challenged candidates for legislative elections.²³

This report by the ERC was successfully transmitted to the National Assembly for consideration in the legislative process. Thus, the National Assembly succeeded in passing the 2010 Electoral law and concluded the review of the constitution. The only credible gender responsive proposal by the National Assembly was the new clause permitting independent candidacy, but this was later thrown out by the state houses of assembly. This counter response another time showed the fiasco of the Nigerian state to lay a legal framework in order to support a gender responsive electoral system. Therefore, one of the challenges for women in the 2011 general elections in Nigeria was the need to lobby political parties for gender parity.²⁴

5. Positions, Participations, and Provisions for Women in the New Electoral Act

Before the Bill to amend the Electoral Act, Nigerian electoral laws have been seen as entrench patriarchy. This is aside the cyclical issues like violence, the selection process, non-inclusion of women, monetization of the electoral process, absence of a level-playing ground, vote-buying, bribery of delegates, electronic voting, powers of the Independent National Electoral Commission, litigation arising from the process, amongst others. Male lawmakers' domination of the National Assembly both in number and influence go a long way to buttress the fear of patriarchal hegemony against 'electoral gender quotas' in the new electoral law. According to Nkwo, 'the three main types of gender quotas are legislated candidate quotas, legislated reserved seats, and voluntary political party quotas.'²⁵ These elements are lopsided in the new electoral law. Unfortunately, the new electoral law tends to focus on the modalities for the elected officers to return to elected offices, without manifest confrontation on the burning national issues of women's under-representation. The concern is rather on how to impose the rich in government, oligarchy, instead of acknowledging that women are grossly under-represented as compared to their population which is more than 50 percent of Nigeria's population. As probed by Nkwo:

The newly approved campaign spending threshold to a minimum of N50 million and N15 billion is nothing short of gender-based violence against women in another form. How many women can muster such a financial war chest after years of discrimination, violence, and lack of opportunities? The Electoral Act has failed to address religion, culture, tradition, finances, and practices that have subdued women since the inception of the country. This is condemnable. We cannot pretend to be unaware of the challenges foisted on women by society, culture, religion, and even tribe.²⁶

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴ T Aremu, 'Redefining Priorities: The Post-2007 Elections Challenge for Nigerian Female Politicians' *Gender Audit of the 2007 Elections and Issues in Women Political Participation in Nigeria* (WARDC Publication, 2008).

²⁵A Nkwo, 'Women and 2022 Electoral Act' *The Punch Newspaper* available at <<https://punchng.com/women-and-2022-electoral-act/>> accessed on 12th February, 2022.

²⁶*Ibid.*

The new electoral law has not made any provision for at least 40 percent gender quota strictly for women. Therefore, the perennial quandaries and quagmires still remain unsettled. This problem is not outlandish and unabated. For instance, having acknowledged the fact that the current Constitution²⁷ is biased in sex, religion, ethnic affiliation, as well as female marginalization, one of the major tenets of the National Conference in 2014 was the need to forge a Constitution that will ensure equity, fairness and justice to all Nigerians. However, till today, the law reform has taken up this task and proffer pragmatic provisions to address female discrimination in political participation. Political parties²⁸ also feel relaxed about this and settled at titles like Women Leader, Deputy Women Leader, Chief Women Organizer, Women of Substance, Women Wing, and so on for women. These titles restrict them to function just within their respective parties while they regard themselves as the eternal followers.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, there is hope based on the consistent women movement in this milieu. This is not limited to the response from the observation in a decline in the number of women elected into political offices from 5.6% in 2015 to 4.7% in 2019, which quests to reverse the downward trend. According to Ifendu, 'in order to address this decline, several civil society organizations, including WIPF, implementing partners and donor organizations have set different innovative projects to reverse these downward trends.'²⁹The prospect is further seen in the activities of civil societies like Women in Politics Forum (WIPF) headed by Barr. Ebere Ifendu. WIPF has launched a website tagged: the 'Nigerian Women Aspirant Website', supported by Action Aid UN body seeks to mobilize 6m women for voters' registration exercise in Q1, 2022.³⁰

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Politics is not a mystery too complex for the human mind to understand. In Nigeria despite global campaign for gender equality, women's political representation has failed to achieve the thirty percent women representation in the state. It is therefore expedient that any corrective measure adopted to address the low participation of women in Nigeria politics will only be superficial unless the nation's socio-economic, cultural, and political factors that limit women empowerment are decisively addressed and most importantly our enacted laws must be amended to incorporate at least fifty percent of women representation that must be compulsorily be adopted by all political parties in Nigeria. The view that politics is a dirty game for women to participate in should be debunked with its proponents. Politics should not be tagged dirty while the other aspects of national life, the economy, sports, law, medicine are considered clean enough for women to participate in. It is further recommended that before the current electoral bill is enacted into law, there should be clear provisions to address women's political participation and to answer the many years of promises of female inclusion by successive governments. In addition, there should be a review of all existing legislation, or the enactment of new ones, to accommodate the participation and effective involvement of women in politics in both elective and appointive positions. This could be actualized by the introduction of the quota system in the laws to enable the participation of women at all levels of government, and further engaging the relevant stakeholders such as the political parties and the INEC to ensure strict compliance. Finally, Electoral Offences Commission (EOC) should be established to ease INEC of the herculean task of prosecution of electoral offenders which its rigorousness may deter interested women.

²⁷ *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, 1999 (as amended).

²⁸ For example Article 6 of the PDP manifesto titled the 'The character of the Party' states that 'it shall be a non-tribal, non-religious and non-sexist democratic organization' (6.1). Section 6.5 says it shall promote the emancipation of women by encouraging their representation at all levels and combat sexism while Section 16 (a) specifically provides for the position of a woman leader from national to Ward level (local). The ALL PROGRESSIVE GRAND ALLIANCE (APGA) constitution and manifestoes has a chapter 16, titled the Policy on Women, which gives a brief but incisive analysis of gender discrimination and emphasized the need to work in accordance with the Beijing Declarations and promote gender parity and more inclusive democracy. The policy proposes to 'fight gender inequality and insensitivities in all aspect of national life through public enlightenments, promote affirmative action in employment, and promote girl child education and compulsory education for girls until 16...' Also, the National Democratic Party dedicated her Chapter 20 to Women Policy. The party promises to take active practical and concrete steps to empower women and facilitate their entrance into various organs of the party; women will be encouraged to contest elective party and public political post and as a matter of politics women will be given their fair share of appointment and accept equality of men and women. Some of these provisions provide opportunities for women to hold their party accountable and demand internal democracy and parity towards 2011 general elections, such interventions can only yield fruits if it is well thought out. See A. Akiyode-Afolabi, *Nigeria's Electoral Reform and the Prospect for Women's Participation in the 2011 Elections* (Heinrich Boll Stiftung, 2013).

²⁹ L Jannamike, 'Woman's Own 2023: Mode of Primaries not Enough Reason to Ditch Electoral Bill' Vanguard (January 19, 2022) <<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/01/2023-mode-of-primaries-not-enough-reason-to-ditch-electoral-bill-women-forum-2/>> accessed on 12th February, 2022.

³⁰ *Ibid.*