

Re-Emerging Inclusive Governance in Contending Gender Imbalance for African Development: A Nigerian Retrospect

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Abstract

The Fourth Republic of Nigeria, which began on May 29, 1999, signaled a renewed commitment to democratic governance. Recently, Nigeria's democratic institutions, especially the Senate, have been challenged with issues that concern sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and abuse of office along gender lines. Essentially, gender imbalance in political representation remains a persistent and significant challenge. Despite various national and international frameworks advocating for gender inclusivity, women continue to encounter systemic barriers that limit their participation in electoral and appointive positions. This paper adopts a historical and methodological approach to examine the evolution of gender representation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It assesses the policies, institutional reforms, and socio-political dynamics influencing women's participation in governance. By tracing the trends of political inclusion and exclusion, the paper critically analyzes how Nigeria has adopted inclusive governance and the effectiveness of interventions in bridging gender disparities. The paper argues that, although progress has been made through policy initiatives and advocacy, entrenched structural constraints, such as political violence, economic marginalization, and cultural biases, continue to hinder substantial change. The paper draws lessons from historical and contemporary perspectives, offering insights into strategies for achieving sustainable gender-inclusive governance as a vital driver of African development. In conclusion, sustainable development can only be achieved by African countries if increasing gender parity in democratic institutions becomes a strategy for building a fairer, wealthier, and more resilient society. Among other measures, the paper recommends legislative and constitutional reforms, strengthening political party frameworks, establishing gender equity desks, and enhancing capacity building for women.

Keywords: African development; fourth republic; gender imbalance representation; inclusive governance and political participation



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Introduction

Women's low political participation has become a universal challenge to the principle of good governance and democracy (Mechkova, 2024). However, the significance of women's involvement in democratic governance and human development cannot be overstated (Okunnu, 2024). A justifiable democratic government relies solely on the participation of all citizens in determining who governs them through electoral processes, and ultimately depends on the equality of all citizens under the law (Webber, 2024; Suparto et al., 2024). Women's legal status as citizens is closely linked to their participation in politics. It also affects their ability to contribute to and benefit from economic and social advancement. Equality, development, and peace will be challenging to attain without the active engagement of women and the inclusion of their opinions at all levels of decision-making (Udom et al., 2024).

Nicolae et al. (2024) note that achieving gender equality in politics through balanced representation promotes inclusive decision-making, enhances policy design, and restores trust in democracies. This could be achieved by addressing the diverse needs, particularly those of women in leadership and decision-making roles. However, the issue of gender imbalance in political representation has remained a critical concern in Nigeria's democratic governance since the country's return to democracy. Although women played significant roles in Nigeria's pre-colonial and early post-independence political structures, the post-colonial and military regimes that institutionalized male-dominated governance frameworks significantly marginalized their participation. With the return to democracy in 1999, the Fourth Republic was expected to provide a pathway for more inclusive governance.

Despite constitutional guarantees and various policy measures designed to address gender disparities, women's representation in both elective and appointive positions in Nigeria remains significantly low. This persistent underrepresentation highlights systemic barriers hindering women's political participation. Moreover, recent issues such as sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and abuse of office, particularly within the upper legislative house, further exacerbate the challenges women face in accessing and sustaining leadership roles. These issues not only undermine efforts toward gender inclusivity but also raise concerns about the commitment of political institutions to fostering a genuinely equitable democratic process. Addressing these challenges is crucial in ensuring that women's political rights are fully realized in practice, rather than merely being legal requirements. Thus, some factors continue to contribute to the persistent imbalance, including inadequate political party support, economic exclusion, electoral violence, and entrenched patriarchal resistance.

African development encompasses the economic, political, and social progress of nations within the continent, aiming to improve the quality of life for its people (Iswanto & Putra, 2024). Gender-inclusive governance is vital for Africa's development, ensuring equitable representation that leads to sustainable policies and decisions. Studies show that when women participate in governance, there is a greater emphasis on social welfare, education, healthcare, and human capital development, all of which contribute to national progress (Zahira & Lestari, 2025). This study argues that addressing gender imbalance in political representation is not only a democratic imperative but also a strategic approach for achieving sustainable developmental goals in Africa.

This is because sustainable development in Africa requires governance systems that are inclusive, equitable, and representative of all inhabitants. Gender-inclusive representation is a fundamental pillar of African development, as it ensures that policies and leadership structures reflect the diverse needs of society. When women actively participate in governance, there is a stronger emphasis on social welfare, education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and institutional reforms, all of which contribute to national growth and stability.

In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, efforts to enhance women's political representation have been met with persistent structural barriers, including cultural norms, economic constraints,

electoral violence, and weak institutional commitments. While some progress has been made through policy interventions and advocacy, inclusive governance remains a work in progress. This study underscores the need for stronger legal frameworks, political will, and grassroots mobilization to dismantle systemic obstacles and promote gender equity in leadership.

For Africa to realize its full developmental potential, women must be included in political spaces and empowered to lead and influence policy decisions. A governance system that embraces gender diversity fosters stability, innovation, and equitable growth, positioning the continent for long-term democratic and socio-economic advancement. Addressing the gender imbalance in political representation is not just a democratic imperative, but a strategic pathway to realizing Africa’s broader developmental aspirations. This paper investigates the level of political representation for women in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, as well as the efficacy of initiatives aimed at increasing gender parity in governance. While countries such as Rwanda, South Africa, Senegal, and Kenya as illustrated by below table have institutionalized mechanisms like gender quotas, constitutional reforms, and party-level affirmative action, Nigeria continues to lag significantly behind, with women occupying only 3.7 percent of parliamentary seats in 2023. This shows that despite Nigeria’s democracy spanning two decades and a half (since 1999), its status as Africa’s most populous country has not translated democratic consolidation into gender-inclusive representation. Existing scholarship highlight cultural and structural barriers, though, there is limited systematic research examining why policy reforms that have proven effective in other African contexts have not been adopted or localized in Nigeria.

Table 1. Showing Nigerian Women’s Representation in Parliament with selected African Countries in 2023

| Country | Percentage of Women in Parliament (%) |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|
| Rwanda | 61.3% |
| South Africa | 46.5% |
| Senegal | 44.2% |
| Kenya | 23.0% |
| Nigeria | 3.7% |

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union; 2023

Conceptual Analyses

Several works of literature on inclusive governance, gender imbalance, political representation, and African development reveal the interconnectedness of these concepts in shaping equitable societies. Inclusive governance emphasizes the participation of all societal groups, particularly those that are marginalized, in decision-making processes. Gender imbalance refers to the underrepresentation of women in political spheres, which hinders comprehensive governance. Political representation is crucial for ensuring that diverse perspectives inform policy-making, while African development is often contingent on addressing these inequalities to foster sustainable growth. Therefore, gender imbalance in

political representation of African women addresses the reality to close the gap of gender disparity of Africa women in political matters of their countries (Enaifoghe, 2019).

Inclusive governance involves integrating diverse voices in political processes, ensuring that marginalized groups, including women, have a say in decision-making. Mohammed et al. (2024) note that faith-based organizations, such as churches and mosques, promote inclusive governance by advocating for equality and justice in their sermons and teachings. The concept of inclusive governance is one of the modern approaches to measuring good governance. This concept has gained significant traction by recognizing that everyone's voice matters, regardless of background or status. According to Sprague (2015) and Masuku and Macheke (2021), inclusive governance is all about ensuring all members (male and female) of society, including the marginalized groups, have a voice and influence in decision-making processes, leading to policies and actions that are equitable, responsive, and beneficial for everyone. Inclusive governance emphasizes the importance of involving diverse groups within society and individuals in the governing process, ensuring that their needs and perspectives are considered and addressed. According to Petriwskyi (2018), inclusive governance requires that everyone in society be given the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their lives, regardless of their status or background.

Singh (2024) states that inclusive governance entails that marginalized and vulnerable groups are represented in decision-making bodies and have a voice in shaping the nation's policies and programs. Enemi (2023) also perceives that inclusive governance promotes transparency and accountability in government actions by ensuring that decisions are made fairly and openly. Thus, the concept emphasizes the importance of the government addressing the needs and concerns of all citizens, particularly those who have been historically marginalized or excluded from governance (Thelma, 2024). As outlined by the aforementioned scholars, Inclusive governance has evolved as a basic strategy in modern governance, considering the concerns of various groups and communities.

Inclusive governance is founded on the fundamental principle that all individuals, regardless of their race, gender, religion, or socioeconomic background, should have the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives. This enhances the quality of policies and initiatives, promoting social cohesion and harmony. By ensuring that marginalized groups have a seat at the table, inclusive governance empowers them to shape their destinies. It acknowledges that the voices of those who have been historically marginalized or excluded are crucial in shaping policies that address their distinct needs and aspirations. Inclusive governance is a powerful tool for addressing social injustices, as it seeks to rectify historical inequities and foster a more equitable society.

Gender imbalance refers to the unequal opportunities, influence, and representation that women typically face in political, economic, and social realms. In political representation, gender imbalance manifests in the underrepresentation of women in elected and appointed positions, resulting from structural barriers such as patriarchy, political violence, financial constraints, and discriminatory party structures. This study examines the persistence of

gender imbalance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic and its implications for democratic governance.

Gender political participation or representation remains a critical issue globally, characterized by significant disparities between men and women. Gender political participation refers to the involvement of individuals in political processes, with a specific focus on the disparities and dynamics between genders. This concept encompasses various modes of participation, including voting, activism, and engagement in political discourse, highlighting the barriers and opportunities that different genders face in these arenas. Understanding gender political participation is crucial for promoting equality and enhancing democratic processes (Sukardi & Sajida, 2023). Gender political participation aims to achieve a balanced representation of women and men in politics, with at least 40% of each group in political and public life (Setiyaningsih et al., 2023).

Gender imbalance, however, is a social term or phenomenon in which citizens are not treated equally based on their gender, stemming from discrimination and sexism. Gender imbalance, according to Moulabuksh et al. (2021), is the unequal distribution of rights, resources, and opportunities between genders, often resulting in disadvantages for women and girls. The term affects various aspects of life, including health, education, business, and political participation, with women often facing more significant barriers in these areas. This paper examines the gender imbalance in governance, which refers to the persistent underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions across various sectors, including political leadership, civil service, and beyond, thereby hindering inclusive and effective governance (Ridwan et al., 2023).

Political representation refers to the ability of different social groups, especially marginalized ones, to have their voices heard and their interests reflected in decision-making processes. It encompasses both descriptive representation, which involves the physical presence of women in political offices, and substantive representation, which measures the extent to which elected officials advocate for gender-sensitive policies and initiatives.

Theoretical Framework

Liberal Feminism, rooted in classical liberal thought, emphasizes equal rights, individual freedoms, and access to opportunities for women within existing political and legal frameworks (Law, 2019; Chambers, 2024). It advocates for policy reforms, constitutional protections, and institutional changes to eliminate gender-based discrimination while safeguarding the integrity of democratic institutions.

In the context of this paper, 'Re-Emerging Inclusive Governance in Contending Gender Imbalance Political Representation for African Development: Nigeria's Fourth Republic in Retrospect,' Liberal Feminism serves as a foundational framework for analyzing the persistent underrepresentation of women in Nigeria's political landscape. This theory provides insight into how systemic barriers, such as discriminatory laws, patriarchal norms, and a shortage of institutional support, impede women's engagement. Liberal Feminism contends that legislative structures should ensure women's equal participation in politics. Nigeria's Fourth

Republic has seen attempts at gender-based electoral reforms, such as the National Gender Policy (2006) and Affirmative Action, but implementation remains weak.

Liberal feminism, in this sense, also advocates for electoral reform. The theory calls for electoral management bodies, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), to enforce gender-inclusive policies, including quota systems, political party reforms, and funding mechanisms to support female candidates. This paper is also grounded in the institutionalization of gender equity in governance, as the theory supports legal mandates that ensure women are included in political appointments, parliamentary seats, and executive positions, which align with global best practices for inclusive governance. The theory also challenges structural discrimination by advocating for the removal of socio-political and cultural barriers. Liberal Feminism aligns with efforts to mainstream gender perspectives in political processes, ensuring women's voices are heard in governance.

Functional-Structuralism Theory (FST) is another framework for analyzing this paper, which examines gender imbalance in political representation during Nigeria's Fourth Republic. FST, which draws on the ideas of Émile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons, views society as a complex system comprising interdependent institutions that maintain stability and social order. It highlights institutions' involvement in maintaining balance and controlling society's functions. In the context of gender inequality in political representation, this theory helps explain how established political structures permit or hinder women's participation in governance.

This study provides a lens for examining how Nigeria's political institutions, cultural norms, and electoral processes influence women's engagement in politics. It highlights the functional roles of women in governance and the structural barriers that impede their inclusion. Firstly, the theory perceives the Political institutions as structural determinants of inclusion. For instance, Nigeria's political system can be structured around historical, legal, and electoral frameworks that traditionally favour male dominance. Functional structuralism explains how these structures create power hierarchies that sustain or challenge gender imbalance.

Secondly, the theory suggests that the weight of social norms and cultural constraints impedes women's participation in governance. The theory helps analyze how deeply ingrained cultural and patriarchal structures function to limit women's participation in governance. Traditional gender roles often relegate women to domestic spheres, thereby influencing political representation. The theory also examines Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), as Systemic Functional institutional governance. As a key institution, INEC plays a functional role in shaping electoral processes. Functional structuralism suggests that if electoral structures are not actively reformed to accommodate gender inclusivity, for instance, through affirmative action or quota systems, they will continue to reinforce exclusion.

Functional structuralism also supports the idea that political systems must adapt to emerging needs. Reforms such as gender quotas and financial support for female candidates

represent efforts to restructure governance for greater inclusivity and representation. The theory views political parties as gatekeepers for major decision-making structures in electoral processes. The limited nomination of female candidates by dominant parties reflects how political structures perpetuate systemic exclusion.

In summary, functional structuralism provides a framework for understanding gender imbalance as a product of institutional structures and societal functions. For Nigeria's Fourth Republic to achieve inclusive governance, political institutions must adapt by integrating gender-sensitive reforms and restructuring electoral processes to facilitate women's representation in governance.

Another theory that applies to this paper is the patriarchal theory. The patriarchal theory, as enshrined in feminist scholarship, particularly in the works of Sylvia Walby, Kate Millet, and Gerda Lerner, examines how male dominance is institutionalized in social, economic, and political structures. It asserts that patriarchy is defined as a system of male authority that operates to exclude or marginalize women from power and decision-making processes. In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, patriarchal theory provides a critical lens for understanding gender disparities in political representation and the impediments that limit women's participation in governance.

Patriarchal theory explains how cultural, political, and institutional structures systematically favor men while restricting women's access to political power. It highlights the entrenched gender hierarchies that shape governance and electoral processes in Nigeria. The theory holds that Nigeria's political landscape is historically and structurally male-dominated, with women often relegated to subordinate roles. Patriarchal Theory helps explain why political institutions, such as the legislature and executive branches, continue to be overwhelmingly controlled by men. Similarly, the theory posits that deeply ingrained cultural norms and societal expectations perpetuate the notion that politics is a male-dominated field, discouraging women from running for office or actively participating in governance. Women who challenge these norms often face social stigma, violence, or financial constraints.

The theory posits that patriarchal structures within Nigeria's electoral system influence INEC's policies and practices, thereby limiting the effectiveness of gender-inclusive reforms. For example, the absence of mandatory quotas for women in political offices reflects institutionalized gender bias. Furthermore, regarding party structure and the marginalization of women, the theory holds that political parties function as gatekeepers to political office; however, their nomination processes are often biased against female candidates. Women struggle to secure party tickets due to financial constraints, lack of internal party support, and male-dominated leadership structures.

Thus, the patriarchal theory provides a critical framework for understanding the systemic barriers that sustain gender imbalance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It reveals how cultural norms, political institutions, and electoral processes work together to maintain male dominance in governance. Achieving inclusive governance requires structural reforms, policy interventions, and cultural shifts that challenge patriarchal norms and promote women's full and equal participation in politics.

Historical Context of Gender Representation in Nigeria

Before the colonial era, women were known to play an active role in traditional political governance (Olaleye, 2024). However, their participation was hampered by the establishment of the colonial government. Women and men had a significant impact on gender balance in African and Nigerian political development. For instance, Queen Amina of the old Zauzau (Zaria) Empire in Northern Nigeria was a key political leader in pre-independence Nigeria. Amina became the queen of Zaria through right of succession. Amina was responsible for the rise and growth of Zaria in the sixteenth century. Some researchers have questioned Amina's historical existence, viewing her as a mythological person. This is due in part to Muslim philosophy and the practice of women in society, particularly in public affairs. Women were not allowed to participate in politics or the judiciary in Muslim countries. Traditional stories, on the other hand, documented Queen Amina and her competent management of Zaria, as well as the state's immense wealth under her reign. In honor of her extraordinary achievements, the modern state of Nigeria has erected a statue in the heart of Lagos. Women are also considered to have been among the thirty-one Ogiso (paramount rulers) who dominated and shaped the political life of the pre-dynastic Benin kingdom (Ogbomo, 2005).

According to Agbalajobi (2021), the colonial authority implemented gender policies, commercial interests, and generalized patriarchal beliefs that supported and perpetuated gender inequality in the country. For example, the colonial government's legislative council, founded in 1922, purposefully excluded women. According to Ajayi (2007), as referenced by Carver (2024), these activities marked the emergence of masculinity in politics, as well as the isolation of women from Nigeria's political mainstream. Women were not visible in the leadership of Nigerian political parties established during this era, as men dominated the political landscape, including the Nigerian National Democracy Party (NNDP), the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC), the Nigeria Youth Movement (NYM), and other parties (Ashafa & Raimi, 2005).

After Nigeria gained independence in 1960, women's participation in governance remained limited due to deep-rooted patriarchal structures, colonial legacies, and socio-cultural restrictions. However, despite these challenges, some women have made significant contributions to Nigeria's political landscape. Their involvement, though constrained, laid the foundation for future struggles toward gender-inclusive representation. During Nigeria's First Republic, women faced institutionalized political exclusion as the political system remained male-dominated. However, extending voting rights to women in Northern Nigeria in 1979, following similar rights granted earlier in the South, was a critical milestone. Although women's representation in elected offices was minimal, some prominent figures emerged in advocacy and political leadership. Among these was Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, a prominent nationalist and women's rights activist who played a key role in mobilizing women for political engagement, though she never held elective office. Margaret Ekpo is another

pioneering female politician and nationalist elected to the Eastern House of Assembly in 1961, making history as one of Nigeria's first female lawmakers. Janet Mokelu and Ekpo Young were also early female legislators who held seats in regional parliaments, advocating for gender rights and social welfare policies.

Between 1966 and 1999, Nigeria experienced several military coups, resulting in prolonged periods of military rule. During these years, women's political representation suffered setbacks as military regimes suspended democratic institutions. However, some women were appointed to significant roles, mainly as part of government advisory bodies. Mrs. Janet Akinrinade was one of the few women who served in advisory capacities during Nigeria's first military rule. Lateefat Okunnu was appointed a federal minister in the 1970s, one of the few women given executive responsibilities under military administrations. With the return to civilian rule in 1979, women were granted full voting rights nationwide in Nigeria, marking a significant step toward greater political inclusivity. However, their representation remained low, as traditional and financial barriers hindered their access to elective positions. Some women like Chief (Mrs.) Janet Akinrinade and Franca Afegbua broke through. Franca Afegbua became Nigeria's first female senator in 1983, representing Bendel North. Her election marked a turning point for women's political aspirations.

Generals Buhari, Babangida, Abacha, and Abdulsalami Abubakar's military regimes continued to exclude women from governance, although a few notable exceptions were involved in governance. For instance, Professor Jadesola Akande became a leading legal scholar and advocate for women's rights. Mrs. Maryam Babangida, although not an elected official, was the first lady and wife of President General Babangida. She championed the "Better Life for Rural Women" program, which had significant implications for empowering women in Nigeria's political and economic spheres. Also, Chief (Mrs.) Bola Kuforiji-Olubi was appointed as the first female chairman of a Nigerian bank, marking a significant milestone in the growing influence of women in governance and the economic sector.

In principle, women's political involvement during the post-independence and military eras was limited, but a few were significantly recognized. Although their representation in governance was minimal, their activism, advocacy, and participation in advisory roles laid the groundwork for greater inclusion in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. With the return to democracy in 1999, women's representation gained more attention, leading to demands for policy interventions, gender advocacy movements, and increased female participation in political parties. However, the legacy of exclusion from the military era continues to hinder the achievement of full gender parity in governance.

Tabel 2. Trend of Women’s Representation in Nigeria’s National Assembly (1999–2023)

| Elections Year | Percentage of Women in Senate (%) | Percentage of Women in the House of Representatives (%) |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1999 | 3.7 | 3.1 |
| 2003 | 8.3 | 5.6 |
| 2007 | 7.3 | 7.0 |
| 2011 | 8.2 | 6.4 |
| 2015 | 6.4 | 5.6 |
| 2019 | 7.3 | 4.2 |
| 2023 | 3.6 | 3.5 |

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC); 2024

Inclusive Programs for Gender-Balanced Governance in Nigeria

While initiatives such as the National Gender Policy (2006) and international commitments to gender equity have provided a framework for increased participation, their implementation has been weak, resulting in limited impact in Nigeria. This paper employs a historical, methodological approach to assess the trajectory of gender representation in the Fourth Republic, examining the successes, setbacks, and prospects for re-emerging inclusive governance. Reflecting on historical patterns and contemporary realities, this paper highlights policy programs that promote gender-balanced political representation and developmental progress in Nigeria. Gender-balanced governance is a critical component of democratic consolidation and sustainable development. In Nigeria’s Fourth Republic (1999- present), various inclusive programs and policies have been introduced to promote gender equity in political representation. However, the effectiveness of these programs remains a subject of debate due to persistent structural, cultural, and institutional challenges.

For instance, the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria provides for fundamental rights and non-discrimination, but it lacks explicit details on gender quotas. The Constitution includes provisions designed to ensure equality and non-discrimination. However, it does not contain explicit gender quotas or mandatory affirmative action policies for women's representation in governance. This omission has contributed to the continued underrepresentation of women in elected and appointive positions in Nigeria. For example, Chapter IV of the Constitution provides for Fundamental Rights, granting all citizens equal rights, including the right to vote, run for political positions, and participate in governance. Section 42(1) prohibits discrimination against any citizen based on their gender, ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation, which means women should not be excluded from political participation or governance roles. Sections 14 (3) and (4) promote the principle of federal character in appointments and political representation.

Despite these provisions, the 1999 Constitution does not mandate gender quotas or affirmative action policies to ensure increased political participation by women. No portion of the constitutional clause required political parties to field a minimum percentage of female candidates for elective offices. Again, the Constitution does not compel federal, state, or local governments to ensure a minimum percentage of women in political appointments. Unlike some African countries, such as Rwanda and Senegal, Nigeria lacks constitutional provisions that ensure a specific percentage of seats designated for women in the National or State Houses of Assembly. The implication is that the absence of constitutional gender quotas has led to weak enforcement of gender policies.

Current records indicate that women hold a small fraction of the seats in Nigeria's National Assembly. Specifically, in the tenth Senate, only four out of 109 seats are occupied by women, which accounts for approximately 3.7% of the chamber. Meanwhile, in the lower chamber, women occupy 17 out of 360 seats, accounting for about 4.7% of that body. Women represent around 4.47% of the total membership of the National Assembly. Efforts to increase female political representation in Nigeria encompass a range of activities undertaken by government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society groups. These efforts aim to eliminate systemic barriers and promote gender inclusion in governance. Several programs have been proposed or implemented to tackle these challenges. Among these are:

1. The National Gender Policy (NGP) was formed in 2006 to ensure women have a minimum of 35% representation in elective and appointive positions. The policy provides a foundation for gender inclusion. However, its implementation has faced challenges, resulting in the continued underrepresentation of women in political offices.
2. Civil Society Organizations: Groups such as the Nigerian Women's Trust Fund (NWTF) provide financial support, training, and advocacy to assist female political candidates. The NWTF, for instance, conducts mentorship programs, offers access to funding, and publishes policy data to enhance women's participation in politics.
3. Legislative Proposals: There have been calls for legal reforms to mandate quotas for women in elective and appointive positions, though such proposals have yet to be enacted. However, in 2022, the Nigerian parliament rejected several pro-equality bills that sought to amend the constitution to address women's issues and enhance their representation in politics. The assembly recommended revisions to the constitution to include the following elements.
 - i. To grant citizenship to foreign-born husbands of Nigerian women.
 - ii. Women can become indigenous in their husband's state after five years of marriage.
 - iii. Reserve 35% of parliamentary seats and political party leadership posts for women.To reserve 35% of legislative seats and political party leadership positions for women.

Despite these efforts, achieving significant improvements in female political representation in Nigeria remains a work in progress, necessitating sustained advocacy, policy implementation, and cultural shifts.

Conclusion

The relationship between gender and political participation, as well as broader developmental goals in Africa, is mutually reinforcing. Enhancing women's participation in modern politics can lead to more inclusive and effective policy-making, fostering economic and social development. As African countries strive for sustainable development, Chikwe et al. (2024) observe that increasing gender parity in democratic institutions may become a strategic necessity for creating a fairer, wealthier, and resilient society. Since female political engagement is intricately interwoven with larger developmental goals in Africa, when women are actively engaged in politics and hold decision-making positions, the ripple effects extend far beyond gender equality (Ndaita & Chebet, 2024). These effects may enhance democratic governance, promote economic growth, and drive social development. These can manifest in the following ways:

1. **Enhanced Policy-Making and Inclusive Governance:** Women can bring different life experiences and priorities to the political arena, which may lead to more comprehensive and inclusive policies. This, in turn, can foster diverse perspectives that enhance the developmental outcomes of education, healthcare, and social welfare. Increased female representation can enhance transparent governance and accountability in public institutions, creating environments that facilitate sustainable development and the implementation of policies that benefit society.
2. **Improved Social and Economic Outcomes:** Empirical evidence suggests that countries with higher gender-inclusive political participation tend to invest more in social infrastructure. Inclusive governance can lead to better healthcare systems, improved educational outcomes, and a more robust social safety net, all of which are essential for achieving broader developmental goals. Again, improving social and economic outcomes can facilitate economic empowerment for women. Women's participation in politics is typically correlated with policies promoting economic inclusion, including microfinance initiatives, entrepreneurship programs, and labor market reforms. These initiatives can reduce poverty and stimulate economic growth, creating a more balanced and resilient economy.
3. **Promotion of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** Among the aims of the recently pronounced United Nations' 2030 SDGs, SDG 5 focuses on gender equality. Moreover, it states that increasing women's political participation is not only a goal in itself but also a means to achieve other SDGs. Empowering women politically can help dismantle systemic barriers, ensuring that gender equality is reflected across all sectors of society. Additionally, SDG 16 emphasizes the importance of peace, justice, and effective institutions. Inclusive governance promotes gender diversity and contributes to the establishment of robust institutions, the rule of law, and peaceful societies. Such stability is a precondition for sustainable development.

4. Cultural Transformation and Social Cohesion: The increased representation of women in political spheres challenges traditional patriarchal structures and promotes a cultural shift toward greater equality. This transformation is crucial for fostering long-term social cohesion and redefining gender roles within African societies. Similarly, empowering female political leaders can serve as role models, inspiring future generations to engage in public affairs. This intergenerational impact can gradually shift societal attitudes and encourage a more balanced political participation.

Recommendations

The paper suggests the following recommendations for the research:

1. Legislative and Constitutional Reforms: Although this has been enunciated in previous electoral bylaws, the federal government should amend, re-enact, and repeal the 35% Gender Quota to legally guarantee that no less than 35% of elective and appointive positions are reserved for women. This will align with global and continental benchmarks such as the African Union Gender Policy. The government should also mandate Gender Parity in party structures, which will require all political parties to include clear gender parity clauses in their constitutions. This would ensure equal or proportionate representation of men and women in party leadership positions and on candidate nomination lists.
2. Strengthening of Political Party Frameworks: Political parties that meet gender inclusion targets should be tied to public funding through increased access to public electoral funds or state subsidies. This performance-based financing would motivate their compliance with gender policies. This enabling effort can serve as an incentive to make political parties more women-friendly. For instance, political parties that actively support and field women candidates may receive additional benefits, including priority media access, campaign subsidies, or partnerships with international donors.
3. Empowerment of Electoral Institutions for Political Oversight and Gender Enforcement: The Government should empower INEC with the legal authority to enforce gender-based nomination rules during party primaries and elections. This can make it possible to create gender rules that increase the space for women in politics. Similarly, INEC could have the authority and oversight to reject party lists that do not meet the minimum gender thresholds. This may also involve INEC regularly monitoring and publicly releasing compliance data showing how well political parties are promoting gender inclusion. This fosters transparency and accountability.
4. Introduction of Gender-Responsive Education Curricula in Schools: The Nigerian government at all levels should revise school and civic education curricula to incorporate themes of gender equality, the political rights of women, and positive examples of female leadership in history and politics, thereby creating opportunities for women's empowerment in politics, society, and the economy. This effort can transform the political culture into a gender-balanced one, while all discrimination against women in the country's politics can be eliminated. Similarly, governments

should support women at the grassroots level, including the allocation of special funds and logistical support, which is crucial to help rural women overcome financial and mobility constraints during elections. This can help democratize access to political power.

5. Establishment of Gender Equity Desks and Capacity Building for Women: Democratic institutions, including INEC, the National Assembly (NASS), and political parties, should be equipped with specialized units that would give priority and attention to gender equity matters and respond to complaints of gender-based exclusion or abuse. These desks would also support advocacy and gender integration.
6. Regular Institutional Gender Audits: A regular gender audit of the institutions can follow the steps outlined above. Structured, periodic assessments of ministries, political parties, legislatures, and electoral institutions should be conducted to evaluate the status of gender inclusion regularly. These audits should measure compliance with national and international gender policies and make their findings publicly available. A national framework that tracks progress in gender representation across the political spectrum can also be developed and implemented. The index should be published annually to rate ministries, political parties, and public institutions

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