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WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS.

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ABSTRACT

Olamilekan Hammed Ibitoye: Women's Political Participation in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

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The study examines the challenges to women's political participation in Nigeria and determines the factors hindering their political participation. International organizations emphasize the importance of women's political participation and its significance to national development. Women still encounter different forms of barriers when participating in Nigerian politics.

The study employs qualitative research design and phenomenology as the research method to understand the challenges women face in political participation. Also, the approach aims to allow women to express their lived experience in Nigerian politics. The theoretical frameworks used are feminist theory and African feminism theory. The research question focuses on the barriers to women's participation and the effectiveness of programs to improve women's participation. Four women participants were selected purposively, and the participation criteria were based on their knowledge of the subject of the study. Data were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and triangulated for validity.

The findings show that women's political participation is still low, and the barriers hindering their success stem from religion, culture, tradition, and patriarchy, among others. Societal perception also hinders women as they are seen as subordinates and not equal to men. Furthermore, women lack the financial capabilities to pursue political goals. There is a lack of adequate policies from the government directed at improving women's political participation.

Keywords: women representation, political party, participation, politics, feminism.

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1. Introduction

Gender equality is essential for the progress and prosperity of every nation; over the years, the United Nations has emphasized the importance of equal participation of men and women in electoral practices to maintain stability in a society (United Nations, 2015). Furthermore, one of the sustainable development goals is the eradication of discrimination and any forms of violence against women and girls. Also, SDG aimed at promoting inclusion in society by encouraging women to participate in the decision-making process required for nation-building. The United Nations policies and SDGs goals acknowledge equal political representation as an integral right of women.

African countries have a long history of colonial and military rule; like many other nations in Africa, Nigeria experiences a change from military to democracy. Nigeria is a democratic republic which became independent from the British in the 1960s. The demographic consists of different ethnic groups and cultures, making the country the most populous in Africa, with a population of over 218 million. Women constitute almost half of the population, and despite making 51 per cent of voters in elections, they have yet to be able to utilize their number for equal representation in political positions in Nigeria. The lack of women's equal participation is due to cultural stereotypes and patriarchal structures which define women as male helpers, caretakers, and home managers, which has set limitations for women and denied them the full rights and freedom men have in Nigeria (Eneh & Nkamnebe, 2011).

Women's political participation is a global issue not only limited to Nigeria, as women are not equally represented in world politics. The Nigerian constitution adopted in 1999 stated that all citizens, without discrimination, have the right to equal opportunity. Yet, there is still a gap caused by long-term gender segregation against women, resulting in women's low participation. Adamu (2023, p. 302) pointed out that Nigeria women have the slightest participation in federal parliament, with around 5.9% representation when compared with her African counterparts like

Uganda, with around 34.6% of women's representation and the neighboring republic of Niger with around (12.3%) of women's representation.

Increasing the participation of women in the democratic process is crucial to affirm Nigeria's government's dedication to democracy, which allows diversity and participation of every citizen. Furthermore, women's political participation is essential for nation-building, and women can only make a significant impact if they are equally represented in Nigerian politics. It is within this context of the existing marginalization of women that this research aims to examine women's political participation in Nigeria

1.2 Problem Statement

Like most countries all over the world, gender marginalization is still prominent in Politics; patriarchal norms have supported male dominance, which is reflected in the Nigerian political sphere. Women are denied the same opportunities as their male counterparts, reflecting their participation politically in Nigeria and representation in the decision-making process. The common belief in Nigeria is that women do not belong in politics, as the patriarchal idea enforces that political activities are only for men. The lack of equality between women and men is evident in public governance, hindering women's economic and social opportunities in Nigeria (Ette & Akpan-Obong, 2023). Women in the northern part of Nigeria were not allowed to vote until 1970, and the overall number of political positions held by women in Nigeria is relatively low compared to the seats occupied by men. Therefore this study set out to address the issue and underlying factors hindering women's political participation in Nigeria.

Over the years, there have been efforts to increase women's representation in political positions. An example of such efforts is the creation of the Empowerment Office and Nigeria Women Trust Funds to foster inclusivity. Also, the national gender policy was set, and the goal was providing 35 percent affirmative action to improve women's participation in politics (Okoronkwo-Chukwu, 2013). However, despite the established institutions and policies, the representation of women remained the same (Oloyede, 2016, p. 10).

1.3 Purpose And Aim Of This Study

This study seeks to examine women's political participation in Nigeria. These studies center on political participation and highlighting the barriers Nigerian women face in politics and

promoting inclusivity in the democratic governance of Nigeria. The barriers include factors such as patriarchal norms and Nigeria's institutional biases. By addressing these obstacles, this study can provide insights to understanding women's participation in Nigerian politics. Research has shown that when women are not equally participating in politics, the perspective and interest of half of Nigeria's population are overlooked, which further undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of democratic governance. This research aims to foster gender equality by challenging discriminatory practices in the Nigerian political sphere.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the barriers preventing women from entering and succeeding in Nigerian politics?
2. What policies and programs aim to improve women's political participation in Nigeria?

1.5 Significance Of This Study

This study is significant Understanding the barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria can shed light on the issues and contribute to advancing gender equality in Nigerian politics. This study will be significant to the academic world and Nigeria government as it builds on the existing literature on women's political marginalization. Gender equality in Nigeria is essential for nation-building; therefore, This research can promote inclusivity in Nigerian politics, where women's rights and voices are recognized and also contributes to the Nigerian government's 35 percent affirmative action goal to improve women's political participation.

1.6 Chapter Outline

The chapter one of study discusses the introduction, problem statement, purpose and aim of study, research questions and significance of study. Chapter two discusses the theoretical approach, literature review and the context (Barriers to women's participation). Chapter three discusses the research approach and research methodology. Chapter four focuses on the results while chapter five shows the discussion, conclusions and limitations of study.

2. Theoretical Framework

Despite the awareness of the feminist movement in Nigeria's social and academic sphere, to date, women have continued to be marginalized in politics. This issue is deeply rooted within the fabric of Nigerian society, and this phenomenon can be understood through the lens of feminism theory. Feminist theory is a foundation for understanding women's challenges in every sphere of life. For this research, the historical aspect and different types of feminism will be explored to understand the barriers women face in Nigeria. Furthermore, the fluidity of feminism has led different scholars to develop different forms of feminism by considering different factors such as history and culture (Tong & Botts, 2017, p 19; Osborne, 2001 p 12). Therefore it is essential to explain the challenges women face in Nigeria through the lens of African feminism as the ideology addresses how culture and traditional structures shapes the social condition of women in Nigeria . This section will start by providing a historical account of the feminist movement and how the movement has evolved over the years and, in the same context, apply African feminist theory to address specific issues faced by Nigerian women.

2.1 Feminist Theory

Feminism challenges society's perspective of women influenced by culture. The movement was created to address societal discrimination against women. The movement aims to break barriers set for women and give them individual autonomy in their lives. Osborne, (pg 8) and Jóhannsdóttir (pg 6) Defines Feminism as an ideology which advocates against gender marginalization and the development of women and their equal participation socially and economically. Furthermore, the movement fights against violence and exploitation, and the prioritization of gender liberty and protection of women from cultural subjugation.

The journey towards revolutionizing women's societal position dates back two decades. Over the years, women have achieved some success by overcoming hurdles hindering them in society (Osborne, 2001, p. 8; Malinowska, 2020, p. 3). Women have achieved realistic representation

and equality, notably in developed countries, as women's participation in the political scene continues to increase. However, women worldwide are still campaigning for equal wages and leadership positions, as only a few women have held political or decision making positions in many countries worldwide (Tong & Botts, 2017, p. 26).

The first wave of Feminism represents the period of women's activism as it addresses women's suffrage in a male-centered society (Osborne, 2001; Malinowska, 2020; Tong & Botts, 2017). The request for women's rights became pronounced when women were denied equality after participating in the French Revolution during the establishment of the new republic (Osborne, 2001, p. 11). The industrialization of the society made gender inequality more apparent as living conditions continued to improve; women were still limited to household activities. The goal of the feminist advocacy of that period was the recognition of women as citizens have access to education and reproductive rights (Osborne, 2001, p. 12)

As the first wave saw the recognition of women as equal citizens and granted them access to education and the right to vote, the feminist discussion shifted towards women's liberation from oppressive barriers in the workforce. The ideology's aim was employment and representation rights for women (Osborne, 2001, p 25; Tong & Botts, 2017, p 27; Malinowska, 2020, p. 4).

Liberal Feminism rose within the feminist movement, and the idea is based on the political values of rights and tolerance. The liberal idea emphasizes the value of freedom for everyone, and liberal Feminism is centered around the extension of rights to women, in which the state must create policies that proponent equality (Tong & Botts, 2017; Baehr, 2013, p. 155).

Radical Feminism is aimed at dismantling the role of men in women's sexual and reproductive lives. The movement believes that men are the leading cause of women's marginalization, and their goal is to remove patriarchal thoughts from society. According to (Tong & Botts, 2017 p39), patriarchy uses biological factors of males and females to define masculinity and femininity, which allows men to dominate women in society. Furthermore, they emphasized that patriarchy is a social construct used to differentiate gender responsibilities (Jóhannsdóttir, 2009). Therefore,

the role of feminists is to challenge the status quo and introduce flexibility in gender classification (Tong & Botts, 2017, p. 40).

Inclusivity of other minority groups in the movement became part of the feminist agenda during the fourth wave as Feminism evolved towards incorporating racial minority groups in its advocacy (Tong and Botts, 2017, p36). Social media platforms became prominent in fighting against women's oppression. (Zimmerman, 2017 p58). The lack of balance in representation in every aspect of society is widely pointed out. Through evolution, Feminism became diverse, opening the door to ideological changes within the movement. However, Feminism has created an environment that merges different social and political challenges women from different classes, races and minority groups face in the broader society.

2.2 African Feminism Theory

The feminist theory served as a foundation for understanding the societal challenges women face. However, Chidammodzi (1995, p 44) noted that the feminist movement was absent of African women's concerns in its approach. Therefore, African feminist perspectives can help understand the challenges to women's representation in Nigerian politics.

Feminism emerged from western societies and the movement was centered around women's suffrage, right to education and equal access to employment (Osborne, 2001). While the movement had outstanding success in improving gender equality both in social and political contexts, alternative African feminism theory offers a different approach by considering the historical, political and economic context of African societies.

According to (Mekgwe (2010), African feminism is about women having autonomy, working together with nature, and prioritizing children and family. Also, African feminism is about African women's freedom and rights. They also believe that their movement should include men for success and fairness (Dosekun 2021). This approach set African feminism apart from the feminist movement which primarily focused on women alone (Mekgwe (2010). African feminism acknowledges the importance of culture in understanding African realities, therefore resisting the generalization of feminist views.

African feminism can be used to understand the dynamics of women's political participation in Nigeria. It recognized that women's experiences are shaped by religion, ethnicity and social class Mekgwe (2010). To address these issues, it is crucial to dismantle the patriarchal structures and other forms of oppression that stem from colonial histories, economic marginalization and cultural/traditional norms that continue to put women in a position of disadvantage in Nigeria.

The broad framework of the feminist movement and its application in diverse cultural scenarios over the years has been subjected to scholarly debates, resulting in the emergence of different movements to address African women's struggles. Odinye (2022) noted that the aim of African feminism is not to change the traditional role of women or men. Instead, it builds unity where men and women can work together in a society.

2.3 Application of the theory

Scholars across social science fields have used several theories to analyze women's societal marginalization. The conclusion from these theories often shows that women's marginalization in politics is based on traditional norms and societal adherence to the patriarchal ideology of gender relations (Bari, 2005). In Nigeria, the perception of society is constrained by patriarchal ideology, which gives priority to men over women in all spheres of society. Male superiority is perceived as part of the natural order, and women are rendered powerless in both the public and private spheres (Sultana, 2010). Nigerian society reflects the feminist theory, which explains the systemic inequalities that influence women's societal marginalization (Chidammodzi, 1995). The feminist theory is centered around understanding the marginalization of women in society and the power structure reinforcing the system. Furthermore, it emphasizes that inequality can be best understood by reflecting on how the dominant groups marginalized the underprivileged groups

Women's marginalization in Nigeria can not be fully explained without considering the complex structure that created the conditions in the first place (Chidammodzi, 1995). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the structural imperatives of a society where women's political participation is instituted and how these factors within the structures interrelate (Bari, 2005). Applying the

feminist perspectives aims to identify the social structures that form the basis of discrimination and how these structures impact women's political participation in Nigeria.

The factors that contribute to marginalizing women in Nigerian societies are embedded within the socioeconomic, cultural and religious structures. This is reflected in women's education, employment and political participation, resulting in underrepresentation. Nigeria's legal and institutional system strengthens these structures which work at women's disadvantage. According to (Ushe, 2019), due to these conditions pointed out by the feminist theory, women in Nigeria are not active in politics as they are generally disadvantaged by gender ideology, which has assigned roles for men and women in society. Gender role perspectives create a societal hierarchy, which generally limits women to reproduction and domestic activities while elevating men to positions of authority (Bari, 2005).

Dosekun (2021, pg 6) argues that African feminism embraces women's motherhood as an integral part of African culture. Furthermore, African feminism does not view reproduction as limiting women. Instead, it reflects African women's relationship with nature and women's power in their reproductive capabilities. However, it is essential to note that these predetermined social roles assigned to women have contributed to the low advancement of women in Nigeria economically and politically.

The participation of women in Nigerian politics remains low in both elected and appointed positions, primarily due to factors highlighted by the feminist theory, and these remain a social issue impacting women in every aspect of Nigerian society. Although, the government of Nigeria emphasizes increasing women's political participation through different policies such as the National Gender Policy(NGP) 35 percent affirmative action, and non-government bodies such as the United Nations advocated for 30 per cent participation in politics. However, women's political participation has yet to improve due to deep-rooted cultural and traditional structural factors that have shaped the fabric of Nigerian society.

Over the years, African feminist scholars have significantly focused on creating an African variant of feminism that differs from the Western feminist movement. However, the fundamental concept of feminism still emphasizes the importance of the inclusiveness of women in society and the eradication of gender marginalization (Olatunji, 2022). Therefore, the theory is

applicable in this study as it helps to understand gender marginalization and the source of gender inequality in Nigerian society. The source can be traced to colonial roots, which dismantle the traditional structure that once existed in Nigerian society.

The old traditional structure operates on the relationship between women and men. Women held important positions in the political setting of traditional societies while still embracing femininity (Ushe, 2019). Based on these factors, African feminism expresses the evolution of gender relations in Nigeria and how women's influence has declined. The decline of women's political influence started during colonialism and the usurping of political power by the military (Olatunji, 2022). In response, feminists like Madam Funmilayo Kuti started a movement called Abeokuta Women's Union that fought against colonial oppression and demanded equal representation of women in politics.

However, over the years, different forms of African feminism have emerged, which sometimes distract from the fundamental goal of eliminating women's oppression in society. Based on these factors, Adichie (2014) noted the importance of not changing the feminist idea or replacing it with different concepts or terms, as it can do away with its originality and the primary purpose of the movement.

2.2 Literature On Women And Nigeria Politics

The following section of my thesis will review academic literature relevant to my research questions. I will review academic write-ups that have explored women's political representation in Nigeria, and the academic literature will cover politics, patriarchy and power structure in understanding the phenomenon of women's political representation in Nigeria.

Factors that hinder women's representation in the Nigerian political system are often influenced by patriarchy, which, in turn, set societal expectations for women. Furthermore, this system of social exclusion based on gender has given men the dominant position at the same time, putting several barriers on the roles and activities of women (Asiyanbola, 2005).

2.2.1 Women's Political Participation Precolonial Nigeria

Culture and traditions have been universally acknowledged as the condition that shapes every society and its identity (Osasona, 2012). In Nigeria's history, traditional rulers are the highest enforcers of the law. Furthermore religion and the institution within the Nigeria societies were influenced by culture and tradition. Men and women participate equally in society, with men and women having gender-based responsibilities assigned to them based on the settings of the culture. Also, age, experience, occupation and marital status were critical determinants in the hierarchical relationship in each society (Anigwe, 2014). In most traditions in Nigerian societies, power was decentralized and equally distributed across elders in different households. Although men dominated the political setting, the political system was tailored in a way where women were allowed political opportunities (Anigwe, 2014).

Women in Nigeria have always been impactful and influential in Nigeria's politics before colonization and during the transition period to full democracy. Before establishing political zones in Nigeria, women played an active role in the administration of the state (Ushe, 2019). Citizens used local political arrangements to manage their society; in the Yoruba region, for instance, women were part of the traditional councils. In these settings, women represented their communities within the king's inner circle by holding different chieftain titles (Ushe, 2019). Women such as Moremi of Ife land and Emotan of Benin are known for their significant role in their towns' politics and governance. Also, in The North, women were part of the political structure of their communities. Ushe (2019) noted, Queen Bakwa Turuku played a significant role in forming the city of Zaria in the 16th century. Her daughter, Queen Amina, was a warrior who built high fences around the ancient city of Zaria to protect her city from invasion (Ushe, 2019). In the East, Omu Okwei played a significant role in Nigeria's current Delta state's commercial scene (Kolawole et al., 2012). In precolonial Nigeria, politics was tailored to suit the unique characteristics of each community, with women playing an active role in political affairs (Ushe, 2019).

Table 1: Data of women traditional rulers in pre colonial Nigeria.

S/N	Name	Town	LGA	State	Type of Rule	Period
1	Luwo Gbadiaya	Ife	Ife Central L.G	Osun	Ooni of Ife	Pre-colonial days
2	Iyayun	Oyo L.G	Oyo L.G	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-colonial days
3	Orompoto	Oyo L.G	Oyo L.G	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-colonial days
4	Jomijomi	Oyo L.G	Oyo L.G	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-colonial days
5	Jepojepo	Oyo L.G	Oyo L.G	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-colonial days
6	Queen Amina	Zauzau	Zaria	Kaduna	Emir	Pre-colonial days
7	Daura	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
8	Kofono	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
9	Eye-moi	Akure	Akure	Ondo	Regent Monarch	Pre-colonial days
10	Ayo-Ero	Akure	Akure	Ondo	Regent	Pre-colonial

					Monarch	days
11	Gulfano	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
12	Yawano	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
13	Yakania	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
14	Walsam	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
15	Cadar	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial days
16	Queen Kanbasa	Bony	Bony L.G	Rivers	Queen	Pre-colonial days

Source: Ushe, U. M. (2019)

2.2.2 Impact of Colonialism

The colonization of Nigeria by the British impacted every aspect of African culture, and the choices of people changed involuntarily. Most of the communities within the British colony surrendered their traditional ways to the compelling ways of colonization. The colonists were not interested in the diverse cultures of the people within the Nigerian territory. Instead, they came mainly for financial and political reasons (Ejeh, 2021). Ocheni & Nwankwo, (2012) argued that Western education is a by-product of British rule and must be seen as a positive impact. However, (Ocheni & Nwankwo) maintained that the problem it caused outweighs the benefits because colonial education is partially responsible for the destruction of African culture and traditions (Ejeh, 2021).

The Western education system adopted by Nigeria was not founded on existing African culture, hence changing the paradigm of Nigerian society. The colonial influence also extended toward the economy; it distorted the African economy and prevented Nigeria from manufacturing, forcing them to depend on foreign goods to fulfill local needs. Ocheni & Nwankwo, (2012) Opined that the African economy was shaped to depend on the colonial powers, which changed the system in which the economy once operated. Before colonization, men and women had freedom in every sphere of their society, and the autonomy was reflected in the local economics and politics. Most of the societies within Nigeria operate on a dual-sex political system where men and women share political power and influence. Women were seen as partners and not subordinates; women were free to live as they wished and held prominent positions as men in society. They were equally involved in trade and commerce in their various societies.

As in many other African societies, colonization changed the political system in Nigerian society; women who once held respectable titles and positions within the king's hierarchy were secluded from the newly formed colonial administration. (Ejeh, 2021) pointed out that colonization was rooted in violence and corruption, resulting in sovereign African societies losing their power of independence and political control passed into the hands of colonial leaders. Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012) noted that the colonial leaders enticed the African chiefs and merchants with gifts, leading to them signing treaties that would shape the destiny of the people living within the Nigeria spaces. Nations within the African continents were forced to produce products such as cocoa, coffee and nuts for exportation, which caused the local farmers to abandon their traditional way of life for international trade opportunities. Consequently, this shift in economic activities affects women's economic power in Nigerian societies.

The colonization of Nigeria was done with the amalgamation of three separate regions to form a single entity called Nigeria. This forceful union between different societies resulted in issues that continue to affect the political setting of Nigeria to this day. Colonial administrators introduced indirect rule by appointing traditional rulers, primarily men, as intermediaries between colonial rulers and the local population. Therefore, women were not considered or equally presented, meaning women who were part of the political bodies of their societies were not considered for administrative positions. The systematic marginalization of women's voices in governance

relegated them to domestic activities and diminished their political influence. According to Ejeh (p 14), colonialism shaped and influenced education in Nigeria, forcing people to abandon their culture and traditions. Western education forced most Africans to abandon their language and adopt the colonial language; native languages were called "Vernacular", while colonial language was called "civilized" (Ejeh 2021).

In the early days of colonialism, the majority of the missionaries were men, resulting in women not having access to Christianity and Islam. Furthermore, missionaries clashed with traditionalists, as many were unwilling to part ways with their beliefs. Most female traditionalists were suspicious of colonial education as they believed it was the opposite and different from their way of life. These issues reflect the ideological conflict between the traditional way of life and colonial religion. Also, Christianity was used to justify colonial rule, and the doctrines changed Nigerian societies' economies and political settings. A similar situation happened in Northern Nigeria, which is a Majority Muslim. Islam was also used to colonize the area, and most of the states adopted the Sharia law, both the doctrine of Islam and Christianity influence the family structure, property rights and inheritance rights, which have shaped Nigerian society as it is today. Overall, colonization disrupted the social framework and gender relation that had existed for decades in the Nigeria societies.

Colonization did not only diminish women's political status and participation, it also altered the economic conditions of women in Nigerian societies (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). Before colonialism, women played a major role in agriculture and the local market. However, with the increase in demand for raw materials in Western countries, international trade became a means of generating wealth for traders and merchants, which worked at the disadvantage of women. With the emerging expansive opportunities, the societies' elite took advantage of the means of production and exportation, and agricultural products shifted from local demand to producing products needed for exportation and international trade (Ocheni, S., & Nwankwo, 2012).

The colonists needed raw materials for their industries, and how the African economy functioned at that period did not guarantee a steady flow of the needed raw materials. This situation prompted the colonists to take over and control the economy of the Nigerian societies. They controlled the economy so that production shifted from local demand to total production of raw materials. For example, if the colonial powers needed palm oil for their soap factories, African

farmers were forced to focus on planting palm trees instead of planting food the local communities demanded (Ocheni, S., & Nwankwo, 2012). These rendered locally produced goods worthless and relegated women to petty business as the importation of foreign products affected locally produced goods. The economic change enriched the society elite and the colonial administrators who later created new laws to protect their endeavors. The newly adopted economy and governance system created a new ideology that slowly secluded women from economic activities. Colonial laws formed a new ideology which believes a women's position is to care for their husbands and children while men should be involved in political and economic activities.

Pereira (2005) Due to the spread of colonial education and religion, the Victorian ideas quickly spread across every part of Nigerian society; the ideas further separated the social relationship between men and women. Pereira (pg 74), the perfect Victorian lady, takes care of her household and supervises the work of the housemaids. Women were seen as pure beings who needed protection away from the troubles of the world to uphold the family and society's moral values. Furthermore, if they were unsatisfied with homemaking, women were encouraged to engage in religious or philanthropic activities, while the men were expected to focus on providing. These ideologies stemmed from the societal changes in the Western world, where society was transitioning from agricultural dependency to industrialization.

Based on these ideas brought through colonization to Africa, women's role in Nigerian society changed, affecting the social and political status they once held in the societies. These new colonial ideas also influenced the education system, as the society administrators started altering education laws and adopting Western-style curricula. The Western education adopted in Nigeria prevented women from practical skills acquisition. Instead, education focuses more on moral and religious teachings. Women were taught how to cater for the household and the women who were permitted education were ones belonging to the elite class. Single-sex boarding schools were created based on colonial protocols; these schools were created not only to teach subjects but also to shape women's character in a Christian evangelical attitude (Pereira, 2005, pg 77).

While the doctrine of evangelical Christianity was being promoted in the southern region of Nigeria, Islamic ideas were used to subjugate women in the Northern part of the country.

According to Pereira (2005), Islam coexisted with traditional ideas in northern Nigeria, but Islamic beliefs became more pervasive through a Jihadist movement led by Usman Dan Fodio. The effect of jihad also changed the laws of the northern part of Nigeria and diminished the positions women once held in the Northern societies. Sharia law was used to govern the north, which also relegated women to domestic activities (Pereira, 2005).

The British colonial administrator supported the Islamization of northern Nigeria, and both Christianity and Islam aligned with the subjugation of women in the newly established Nigeria as it benefited the economic and political control of the colonial powers. Furthermore, with the increased demand for raw materials from Western industries, women were withdrawn from economic activities such as farm work. Instead, they were made to focus on processing groundnuts in northern Nigeria, while in the Southwest, women were tasked with spinning cotton and processing cocoa pods (Pereira, 2005).

In precolonial Nigeria, different ethnic communities lived harmoniously and respected each other's territory. This does not imply that conflict does not exist among them. However, when the colonial authorities forcefully merged the diverse ethnic groups, the possibilities of conflict increased. The colonial laws reduced individual land tenure, which reduced the available land for grazing and created civil conflicts (Wa Muiu, 2008). Differences that could have been resolved within the local traditional system became more difficult to settle, and women with traditional institutional influence were no longer allowed to participate. Colonialism undermined women's political power, and conflict resolution was based on colonial laws, which were not recognized by the indigenous people (Wa Muiu, 2008).

Wa Muiu (2008) Colonial laws replaced matriarchal societies with patriarchal ones and It reshaped gender relations to the disadvantage of women. Wa Muiu (2008, pg 85), with the imposition of Islam and Christianity, traditional beliefs were demonized, and many women were reduced to menial activities with a limited role in society. However, women in Nigeria did not accept this relegation without putting up a fight; they struck and protested against the colonial administrators

To date, women in Nigeria are still recognized for the vital role they play in the Nigeria struggle for independence during colonialism Ushe, (2019). Omodia et al. (2013) noted that women have

always affirmed themselves in political discourse and they provided examples of the Market women from the Eastern part of Nigeria who led the famous Aba women riot in the colonial era of Nigeria to show the struggles of the market women. The riot happened due to the colonial government's effort to keep women away from politics. According to Okoronkwo-Chukwu (2013), colonialism affects the traditional setting of the society, impacting women's economic and political participation. The colonial leaders wanted women to commit only to household activities and avoid economic and political activities. Women's rejection of this idea led to the imposition of tax on their business activities, hoping that heavy tax obligation would repress the women. Madam Ikonna and other prominent women leaders of the Aba market led a protest against the imposed tax in 1929, and the uprising was to challenge the colonial oppression of women. The riot remained a significant historical movement that solidified women's efforts for rights and equal representation in society (Okoronkwo-Chukwu, U. 2013, p 43).

20 years after the Aba riot, Mrs Funmilayo Ransome Kuti from the western part of Nigeria led the protest of Abeokuta women union which resulted in the abdication of the King during the period. In addition, Hajia Swaba Gambo, who hails from Northern Nigeria, significantly addressed women's challenges in 1948 (Omodia et al., 2013). Although these women achieved political milestones and they serve as a proof that if women are given political responsibilities they will perform effectively, however the societal perception of women remained unchanged as women representation continually declined over the years.

2.2.3 Postcolonial Representation Of Women In Politics

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that equal representation in politics is fundamental for a nation's government (United Nations, 1948). Also, women's participation in economics and politics is substantial for achieving transparency and sustainable development of society. The power dynamic that hinders women from full political expression functions on various levels in Nigeria society, from the individual to the political public; these dynamics shape and limit women's ability to participate effectively in the political sphere.

Nigeria became independent on October 1, 1960, and was declared in 1963, signaling the end of the colonial era; the country's prospects appeared hopeful, with high expectations for economic growth and political transformation. As the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria also saw itself as a symbol of progress for other African colonized societies. After a series of amendments to the Constitution after independence, Nigeria adopted a new constitution on May 31, 1999. Within the Constitution is a guarantee of equality and rights of every citizen.

Nigeria is a federal republic modeled after the United States style of government. The president of the country possesses the executive power, and the upper chamber and the lower chamber of the legislative arm hold the country's legislative power. The chambers are the House of Representatives and the Senate House, generally called the National Assembly. The House of Representatives is presided over by the speaker of the House, and it has 360 members elected for a four-year term by their constituents. The Senate has 109 members, with three representatives from each of Nigeria's 36 states and one member representing the federal capital territory. This system mirrors that of the USA, in which power is divided in all arms of government for checks and balances.

Over the years, Nigeria has experienced changes in the political system due to military coups that have disorganized the political settings of the country. According to Udogu, E. I. (2009), Nigeria's political stability has been damaged due to decades of political corruption and military coups. Furthermore, civil wars that emerged within religious and ethnic lines have further fractured Nigeria's democracy. The challenges facing Nigeria's Political setting stem from the national identity of the area known as Nigeria; Udogu, E. I. (2009) pointed out that while Nigeria may be perceived as a single country to the outside world, internally, identities remain centered on local communities that have existed before the creation of the nation called Nigeria. The ongoing political instability and ethnic divide contributes to impede women's political participation in Nigeria.

The position of women in Nigeria's politics and decision-making remains a social issue as gender stereotypes are deeply ingrained in the societal psyche. In the first republic, when Nigeria gained independence, only four women held the position of legislator in the country. The number was insufficient to influence politics during that period. Furthermore, the military takeover in 1966

further disarrayed women's participation as military usurpers dissolved the government and appointed fellow military men within their ranks (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013). Although when the military government returned to power, the first formal quota system was established to foster the inclusion of women into governance. The law stated that at least one woman must be included in the executive council in every state. Implementing the initiative resulted in women being appointed to councils in every state.

The political situation took a different turn during the second and third republics, in which few women gained political positions in the local government across the country. In early 1990s, two women emerged as deputy governors they were Mrs Sinatu Ojikutu in Lagos state and Mrs Cecilia Ekponyong in Rivers state, and Mrs Franca Afegbua became the first and only woman to be elected as a senator (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013). In the same year, Women's representation increased, and they held more political positions compared to previous years. The 1992 senatorial election saw Mrs Kofo Bucknor elected into the senate and some women won seats in the House of representative. Mrs Florence Ita Giwa was one of the few women who was elected to represent her constituency. The years ahead saw few women appointed to ministers positions and they were included in the cabinets of the Military leaders (Ushe, 2019).

As noted by Luka (2011, p 27), The Nigerian political landscape saw increase in women's representation when Nigeria completely transitioned to civilian rule. The civilian President of that period, President Olusegun Obasanjo, appointed a significant number of women to ministerial positions and other executive positions within his government. From the time he assumed power, the number of women continued to grow dramatically (Ngara & Ayabam, 2013). Nonetheless, the positions were not elective positions. Instead, women mostly held appointed roles, which were not influential in the country's decision-making process.

The fourth republic started in 1999 and it marked Nigeria's return to democracy, bringing with it a renewed hope for an inclusive political landscape. However, from 1999 till 2024 of interrupted democratic governance, women still struggle to significantly increase their representation in politics. The stagnation is evident when compared to the target set by the United Nations Women's Watch, which advocated for women political and economical empowerment (Adamu, 2023). Furthermore, The United Nations Beijing declaration set a standard of 30 percent of

women's participation in decision-making positions. Several African countries have made efforts to achieve the United Nations' goals and some have been successful in surpassing these targets. According to data from the United Nations, Rwanda has the highest number of women in Government, with around 61.3 percent, followed by Senegal with 46 percent, South Africa 45.61 percent, Zimbabwe 45 percent and Namibia 44.23 percent (United nation report 2023). Conversely, Nigeria falls behind, electing the fewest women to parliament, with only 2.8 percent members in the upper chamber and 3.9 percent in the lower chambers in the 2023 election. Over the years, women have been elected and appointed to various positions in the Nigerian political system. However the position women hold remains significantly low compared to women in other African countries.

2.2.4 The Senate And House Of Representative

The gender disparities in Nigerian politics reflects in the elected seats occupied by men and women both in the House of the Senate and the Federal House of Representatives. Since independence, Men have consistently dominated the legislative bodies of the Nigerian government which reflect the ongoing marginalization of women.

From 2015 to 2023, there has been a fluctuating pattern in the representation of women in both the Senate and House of Representatives. In the Senate, female members have ranged from 2.75 per cent to 7.34 percent of the 109 member seats from 2015 until 2023. These numbers are relatively low compared to the seats occupied by men. The highest representation of women was observed in 2019, with eight female members making 7.34 per cent of the total 109 seats. However, by 2023 the number of female members declined to 3, making just 2.75 percent.

Similarly, in the House of Representatives, the percentage of women varied between 3.61 percent and 5.56 percent from 2015 to 2023. The highest representation was in 2015, with 20 female members elected to represent their constituents, constituting 5.56 percent of 360 member seats. However, the number of female members has declined; in 2020, the number fell to 13 female members, making up 3.61 per cent of the total 360 members.

These trends show the persistent obstacles to achieving gender equality in Nigerian politics, with women's representation remaining lower than their male counterparts in both chambers of the Nigeria National Assembly.

The table shows data from the Senate and House of Representatives showing the total numbers of female members and their percentages in each given year.

Year	Chamber	Total Members	Female Members	Percentage of Female Members
2015-03	Senate	109	6	5.50%
2015-05	Senate	109	7	6.42%
2019-12	Senate	109	8	7.34%
2023-02	Senate	109	3	2.75%
2023-12	Senate	109	4	3.67%
2015-03	House of Reps	360	14	3.89%.
2015-05	House of Reps	360	20	5.56%
2019-02	House of Reps	360	19	5.28%
2020-01	House of Reps	360	13	3.61%
2023-02	House of Reps	360	14	3.89%

Source: Union, I. P. (2023). IPU Parline: Global data on national parliaments.

There are numerous factors responsible for women's low participation in Nigerian politics. One of the major contributors is patriarchy, which is more pronounced in the religions that emerged

from colonialism and have shaped the perception of society (Agbajobi, 2010). As highlighted by Agbajobi (pg 78), the family is the principal institution of patriarchy, with the concept of "The rule of the Father" to justify women's marginalization in society. The idea that men are the head of the family gave them higher social status than women, and this idea extends into the public sphere. The concept of the family plays a significant role in maintaining the social dominance of men across every sphere of society (Agbajobi, 2010). These ideas also influence women's perceptions and affect their political participation. Many Nigerian women view politics as dirty activities embroiled in violence, further preventing them from participating in political activities. These societal perceptions have placed men in a dominant position in politics and perpetuating stereotypes and justify women's subordination (Agbajobi, 2010).

The discrimination against women in Nigeria extends to economic activities as well. The historical alienation of women from economic activities during colonialism also gave men more financial power to pursue their political aspirations. Since many Nigerian women depend on men financially, and men predominantly own most companies, women cannot financially mobilize support for themselves or pursue political endeavors.

Societal norms in Nigeria dictate that women should not pursue political ambitions; it is a realm reserved for men. Women are taught from childhood to prioritize marriage and homemaking. This type of education has continuously prevented women from competing with their male counterparts in politics (Agbalajobi, 2010).

2.2.5 Efforts Towards Women's Empowerment

Women in Nigeria have made several efforts to change their social conditions. They have come a long way in business, education and politics to limit the barriers perpetuating their marginalization (Ovute et al., 2015). Despite these efforts to change the status quo, they are still relegated to subordinate status due to the lack of economic and political influence required to change their social conditions. Ushe (2019) opined that Nigerian women are hindered by culture, preventing them from having equal representation politically and economically in Nigeria.

Government and non-governmental organizations, such as the World Conference, have advocated and discussed various challenges women face and continuously emphasized the need for equality in national development. The 1975 conference was held in Mexico City, Copenhagen 1980, Nkrobe in 1985 and the Beijing conference in 1995 (Ovute et al., 2015). At the top of this conference's agenda is improving women's political participation. In addition, the former president's wife, Patience Jonathan, also held a summit in 2014 to discuss improving women's political participation in Nigeria. These conferences brought gender issues to the global front by emphasizing the importance of women's empowerment (Ovute et al., 2015).

In Nigeria, different organizations have emerged to empower and promote women. Such bodies are the defunct Better Life for Women program, the Family Support Program (FSP), the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), Women in Nigeria (WIN), Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON), and Take It Back movement among others. All these movements are created to promote equality and empower women in Nigeria. In addition, the Nigerian government created a policy called (National Policy for Women) to increase women's political participation (Ovute et al., 2015). Within the policy, the government aims to improve women's political representation to 30 per cent. However, all these efforts are yet to materialize as women's condition is yet to improve in every sphere of Nigerian society.

2.3 Barriers preventing women's political participation in Nigeria.

In this section I will present the context in which this research is based. Following the literature review that examined the history and the root causes affecting women's political participation in Nigeria, this section will discuss how these historical factors have influenced the current outcome and perpetuated challenges for women in Nigerian politics.

2.3.1 Cultural Barriers

Cultural norms and customary practices greatly influence women in Nigerian society. Suleiman, (2017) describes culture as a social practice shaped by history, social experiences and the material condition of people living in a particular society. Culture plays a pivotal role in shaping people's identity and perception of the world. Also, culture has often been used as a means of depriving and suppressing women in Nigerian society.

Parents and guardians often discourage women from participating in public life from childhood to protect the cultural identity of virtuous women. They are expected to embody traits such as quietness, piety and submissiveness, and are discouraged from participating in activities deemed unfit for women by society. These cultural norms prevent women from participating in public affairs as they are deemed inappropriate by cultural standards (Suleiman, 2017).

Suleiman I. (2017) pointed out that these cultural norms hindering women's pursuit of politics stem from a patriarchal system. Patriarchy is characterized by male kingship and paternal authority, which grants men dominance over women (Suleiman 2017 pg 22). In this system, the central power of a family rests with the father, who is the provider of the family, giving them the full authority to maintain power and control resources. Consequently, the cultural position of men within the family extends to the broader society, which allows men to dominate politics and set societal standards for women (Suleiman, I. 2017). Therefore, the cultural idea of a virtuous woman is seen as one who is quiet and submissive, while the culture portrays the men as the head and the power of the society. These cultural norms put women at a disadvantage; if they attempt to participate in politics, they are seen as defying culture and customary practices.

2.3.2 Religious Barriers

Religion and spirituality are an integral part of Nigeria; according to (Adamu & Para-Mallam,2016), 87 percent of Nigerians consider religion important to them, and around 90 per cent of Christian and Muslim Nigerians affirm their attendance at religious services frequently. Religious expression is rife in public and private life and is also used as an instrument for political control. A most common abuse of religion is the reintroduction of Sharia law in several Muslim states in Nigeria. The majority of the Nigerian population are practicing Muslims or Christians, with only a few people adhering to traditional beliefs. Religion is intertwined with culture in Nigeria, and both are often used to justify each other when necessary. According to Suleiman (2017), the overlap between religion and culture is closely linked to politics, which has often been used to justify women's marginalization in Nigeria. While most Christian doctrines in Nigeria are reserved in their support for women's participation in politics, Islam is stricter with

women's participation in politics, in which women in northern Nigeria do not participate or aspire when compared to other women in southwest Nigeria. Agbalajobi (2010 pg 80) noted, "Patriarchy has God on its side", meaning Both Christianity and Islam portray Eves as an after-creating from Adam's spare rib, portraying women as secondary to men; these views shape the mindset of most Nigeria when they view women's political participation.

Religion legitimizes male dominance, and the scriptures are often cited for this justification. Everyone in Nigeria has equal rights guaranteed by the constitution. However, that is merely in principle; practically, Nigerians are governed by customary and sharia law (Para-Mallam, 2010). The combination of religion and cultural norms affects women in every aspect of society. Religious organizations preach religious values through their teaching, which influences social norms and institutions, and they use these teachings to enforce social practices, which enables men to use religion to legitimize their authority (Para-Mallam, 2010). It is important to note that many religious leaders are men, further legitimizing men in positions of authority.

According to (Para-Mallam, 2010), cultural and religious beliefs tend to fulfill the interest of powerful groups whose dominant perspective shapes the consciousness of the less powerful. He further stresses that religion is known for its sacred and divine nature, dominant groups often justify it to prevent resistance and uphold their authority (Para-Mallam, 2010). Culture and religion have worked to the advantage of men in Nigerian society, and it has been used to suppress women's positions, which also affect their level of participation in Nigerian politics.

2.3.3 Ethnicity Barrier

The amalgamation of Nigeria was created for the convenience of colonial interest and forcibly united people with diverse cultures, traditions and languages to live and govern as one nation. As a result, Nigeria is populated with over 300 ethnic groups, with Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo standing out as the predominant cultures (Adegbami & Uche,2015). However, within this predominant culture, the culture and traditions among the people differs. The Hausa/Fulani ethnic group dominates the North, the Igbo people dominate the East, and the Yoruba dominate the southern region of Nigeria (Adegbami & Uche,2015) .

Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, the three dominant ethnic groups controlled the politics of Nigeria; however, the agitation from minority ethnic groups led to the division of Nigeria into 36 states in 1966 (Adegbami & Uche,2015). Despite this administrative restructuring, the politics in Nigeria is based on ethnicity and ethnic affiliation. The persistent struggle for power among these diverse ethnic groups often undermines peace in Nigeria which in turn affects women's political participation.

Nigeria is not a federation but a geographical expression; Nigeria is not a homogenous entity like Sweden, Finland or Denmark. Instead, Nigeria is an establishment of British imperialism, created primarily for profit purposes without consideration of its ethnic complexities (Ejeh, 2021).

The politics of ethnicity have made it difficult for Nigerian politics to be fair and elect the right people to the position of authority. Election and political appointments are first based on gender and where the candidate hails rather than the candidate's competency (Adegbami & Uche,2015). Ethnic and gender politics have hindered Nigeria's political advancement, resulting in appointing people who do not have the country's interest at heart. The ethnic-based discrimination has hindered women's political participation, as the political process and institution are generally dominated by certain groups. Resulting in the exclusion and marginalization of women from minority backgrounds (Henry et al., 2023). Furthermore, women from minority ethnic groups face biases in political spaces and have limited access to resources.

2.3.4 Lack Of Unified Movement

Despite these challenges, women have tried to overcome the barriers created by religion, patriarchy and culture. Women continue to aim for better representation in the Nigerian political sphere. According to Olugbemi & Omoniyi (2021, p 45), women often do not get supported by other women; they noted that wives of the ruling class only work during the election period to support their partners to assume office. They do not mobilize enough to support female candidates to counter the issue of gender disparities and change the status quo. The lack of support from women in positions of influence further prevents women from challenging political malpractice and violence. Corruption is not gender-based in Nigeria; both the men and women in

positions of influence are more concerned with their political party and their individualistic desires, which further impedes women's integration into politics in Nigeria (Olugbemi & Omoniyi, 2021).

Women have made efforts in Nigeria to mobilize a movement to push for equal representation and implementation of inclusive policies within the government. However, Anigwe (2014) noted that ethnicity and religion significantly impact the mobilization of women's movements in Nigeria. The ethnic division is reflected in every aspect of Nigerian society, hindering having a unified voice when addressing common issues.

According to Okeke-Ihejirika & Franceschet (2002), for women's movement to succeed depends on their relationship with the existing political discourse in that country and their ability to articulate gender-based demands within that context. They suggest that the extent to which this goal will be achieved will depend on gender ideologies and the broader socio political landscape (Okeke-Ihejirika & Franceschet, 2002). The lack of prominent social and political movements in Nigeria has prevented women from making gender-based demands in Nigerian politics.

Okeke-Ihejirika and Franceschet (2002) opined that women's movement in civil society can influence social demands. Such a movement existed both before and during colonialism in Nigeria. However, Anigwe, A. (2014) argue that these movements are too individualistic in their goals and lack cooperation in addressing gender inequalities in a social context. Additionally, the movement is poorly organized and lacks goals and objectives, often derailing their effort.

Women's participation in anticolonial struggles in Nigeria led to the creation of the National Women's Union in 1947. This organization had nationwide representation across ethnic, religious and social classes. Margaret Ekpo and Funmilayo Kuti carved the movement through their mainstream political accomplishments; the movement aimed to challenge colonial oppression and advocate for women's rights in society (Okeke-Ihejirika & Franceschet, 2002). However, the movement's original goal was diluted as the elite women's organization started prioritizing charitable endeavors funded by the male ruling class instead of challenging them.

Additionally, the establishment of the national council of Women's Societies was created in 1959 across the country, and it played a pivotal role in Nigeria's women's movement; at some point,

the movement diverted its purpose towards a neutral course instead of campaigning against women's marginalization in Nigeria (Okeke-Ihejirika & Franceschet, 2002 pg 450).

2.3.5 Access To Resources

Education creates opportunities and provides access to personal and professional growth: It is also the most crucial way of removing people from poverty (Aja-Okorie, 2013). However, many women in Nigeria lack adequate education and training, preventing them from pursuing political aspirations. The level of illiteracy among women in Nigeria impacts their participation in political activities, and it limits their ability to have meaningful opinions in civil discourse (Ushe, 2019). In Nigeria, Girls drop out of school in Nigeria more than their male counterparts (Aja-Okorie, 2013).

Aja-Okorie, (2013) noted that education is essential not only for employment purposes but also to empower people with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate society and demand their rights. Education is fundamental for building awareness and self-confidence in pursuing equality and inclusive policy in Nigeria. However, Ushe (2019) noted that due to cultural norms and societal expectations, most families in Nigeria prioritize the education of male children while relegating the females to learning household activities (Aja-Okorie, 2013). Society believes the male child will carry the family legacy, while the daughters are expected to marry and assume their husbands' identities.

Consequently, families invest more resources in their sons' education while neglecting the educational needs of their daughters (Aja-Okorie, 2013). Gender biases in education impact the social and economic condition of Nigerian women, who are often limited to petty trading and informal sectors due to limited opportunities (Ushe, 2019). The lack of access to financial resources hinders women's economic independence and autonomy in Nigeria. Ushe, (2019) noted that, although female education attainment is higher in Nigeria's eastern and southern regions, female education is mainly centered around art, humanities and social sciences education. Furthermore, anti-woman education is still prominent in northern Nigeria due to deep-rooted cultural norms and religion (Ushe, 2019). These social issues continue to hinder the

progress of closing the gender gap in education and consequently limit women's participation in various spheres of Nigerian society, including politics.

Lack of resources and economic power put women in a disadvantaged position when mobilizing support for themselves in politics. Most women lack the financial capabilities to pay for nomination fees in their political parties. Many political nominees often bribe their way for nomination tickets, which are usually expensive. For example, in a bid for a presidential nomination ticket, Former president Atiku Abubakar donated Millions in Nigerian currency and luxurious vehicles to party members for their votes (Onah & Nwali,2018, p. 13). Due to economic disproportion, Most women in Nigeria can not afford to get nomination tickets or mobilize political movements, which depend heavily on finances (Olufunke, 2013, p. 31). In the last presidential election in Nigeria, the presidential nomination ticket in the APC political party cost One hundred million naira. Most women in Nigeria can not afford to pay such an amount, contributing to their marginalization within political parties (BBC News 2022).

2.3.6 Impact Of Patriarchy

Patriarchy has been a barrier to women's rights and development in Nigerian society. The idea is motioned with domination and masculinity, which is used to describe men. According to Jaiyeola, E. O. (2020, p 11), patriarchy is a social idea weaponized against women to identify them as inferior to men. The notion influences how children are raised, with the boys being taught to exalt control, and girls are expected to yield to the boy's authority (Jaiyeola, 2020, p. 12). Such a mindset prevents women from participating in political positions as they believe men should be in positions of authority. In contrast, women should concede to their command and devote themselves to domestic activities.

According to Jaiyeola (2020, p 12), patriarchy was more pronounced when Nigeria became independent as it affirms men's ascendancy to the position of power and influence most held by military leaders. Mensah, E. O. (2023) classified gender as a social creation which influences societal roles and responsibilities. Thus, The gender expectation of women in Nigerian society is interwoven with culture and patriarchy.

In pre-colonial Nigeria, women and men coexisted equally in a traditional setting, allowing women to contribute to political affairs without being marginalized by men. However, colonial rule changed Nigeria's political administration, limiting women's political participation (Anigwe, 2014). Colonialism influenced the shift in ideology, undermining the traditional power structures that once existed in Nigeria.

One of the reasons the colonial ideology changed Nigerian society was that when the British took over the administration of Nigeria, the British society was highly patriarchal and enforced its societal structure to undermine the traditional indigenous structures that once empowered women in Nigerian societies (Anigwe, 2014). Western values related to family and gender were imposed on Nigeria by colonial rulers. Moreover, Africans who have received Western education also popularized Western values through religious evangelism. The evidence reflects on how the colonial rulers imposed their patriarchal structure, through the dissolving of the existing dual political system and weakened the women's political position in Nigeria (Anigwe, 2014). Notably, this was often achieved through violence, with many cases of rebellion and uprising against the colonial administrator. However, the superior firepower of the colonists subdued these movements.

The colonial structure resulted in the current condition of women in Nigeria, which limits their access to resources, political voice and employment opportunities. The women's socioeconomic conditions have limited their ability to progress in Nigerian society, and they remain oppressed and discriminated against in various sectors (Alewo & Olong, 2012). The challenges women face in Nigeria are more pronounced in the northern region of Nigeria; many women are forced into the purdah system of marriage. Also, education is often not prioritized for girls; instead, they hurriedly marry them off at tender ages. Also, women in northern Nigeria are strictly restricted by family, Sharia law and cultural norms, which prevents them from expressing themselves socially or politically (Alewo & Olong, 2012). This suppression affects their personal development and impedes them from political participation. Although Nigeria women are allowed voting rights and are voted for, however, the institution in Nigeria still prevents women from fully exercising the total rights given to them by the constitution. The subjugation of women in Nigerian society has put them in a position of disadvantage, and the domination of

men reflects every aspect of Nigerian society. This relegation has left women in the position of second-class citizens.

2.3.7 Gender Stereotype

In Marriage, women are deemed as the property of their husbands (Jaiyeola, 2020). Consequently, men have more privilege in the household; the entitlements of men extend to ownership of property and economic-related activities. Due to these opportunities available to men, they control the economy and the decision-making position in the political space. Conversely, women are deprived of the chance to make substantial economic and political breakthroughs (Ajala, T. 2016 p 2). The uneven distribution of wealth positioned women in a disadvantaged position to bargain for powerful positions or mobilize and fund a political movement.

Gender inequality is an issue widely addressed in Nigeria, and the constitution of Nigeria gives every citizen equal rights to political participation. The general public's mindset towards women's participation in public positions is often shaped by the preconceived perception that women should only engage in menial activities, not leadership roles (Makama, 2013, p. 117; Ajala,2016, p. 6). These ideas show in voters' behavior during the election.

As noted by (Makama,2013), Men are seen as natural leaders; these patriarchy-influenced thoughts naturally put men in an advantageous position above other women contestants. In most cases, women must prove they are good housewives or mothers before being elected into political office. Also, women only get respected when they are married, as it is widely believed that marriage is the highest honor a woman can possess. It is widely said in Nigeria, "The husband is the crown of a wife" Such a notion shields women from showcasing their skills or contributions to the broader society (Mensah, 2023).

2.3.8 Impact Of Violence

Gender violence in Nigeria occurs in different forms; it ranges from verbal abuse to physical attacks, which are predominantly justified by religiosity and cultural beliefs. The victims of this

form of violence are primarily girls and women, and it occurs in relationships or a broader social context, such as sexual abuse and economic deprivation (Irene,2016, p.74). Nigeria's constitution widely addresses the issue of gender-based violence, and the act is punishable under the law (Constitution of the Federal Republic 1999 Act 2015). Subsection (19) of the law clearly states that any form of domestic abuse can result in hefty fines or years of imprisonment for the perpetrator. However, with the growing awareness against any form of violence, many cases go unreported as culture and religiosity justify it as a form of disciplinary action (Omidoyin, 2018, p. 45). The number of domestic abuse in Nigeria is above 80 per cent, with most cases not reported. The situation of abuse is complex as women who decide to report lack the support they need. According to Omidoyin, (2018, p 43), most cases of the report of abuse that are reported do not receive authoritative action as most of the police staff are men. Nigeria was placed 110th out of 135 countries in the global gender gap report, which compares countries' gender-based disparities (Gender Gap Index, 2012, p. 9).

Political competition often attracts violence, a tactic the political elite uses to scare off their opposition during the elections. The issue with Nigeria is that the people responsible for managing the society's orderliness are the main perpetrators of political conflicts. They are generally known as the Godfathers. They fund thugs and machinery to incite violence and interrupt elections whenever it is not going their way (Abdullahi, M. 2013, p 64). There is a common saying in Nigeria: "Politics is a dirty game". Women are victims of political conflicts in Nigeria, which also influence their lack of participation as they are often targeted during and after the election.

There have been many cases of attacks on female politicians in Nigeria; an example is the killing of the women leader of the Labour Party in the northern part of Nigeria. Gunmen attacked the woman, which led to her demise. According to the news reported by Vanguard Nigeria, many female politicians experience gender based violence, mainly during the election period, and the reason for the attacks is to deter them from politics. Mrs Victoria Chintex recounted the time gunmen attacked her as she was lucky to escape due to police intervention, and she has since then carried pepper spray to protect herself from future attacks (Vanguard news).

Other reports of sexual violence against women were during a political campaign in the south of Nigeria; there was a report that men threatened women who partook in political campaigns. Some women were raped in the bush and the car. When they reported to the police, the family of the victims clearly stated, " I didn't bear you for politics" These ideas and violence deter women from participating in politics in Nigeria (Para-Mallam, 2015).

In other cases, women political candidates receive threats not to participate in the primary elections in their political parties and leave the nomination candidacy for the men. An aspirant recounts her experience of being called and warned not to participate in the primary election.

A study carried out by Olufunke, A. J. (2013 p 31) shows that the violence against women during the elections is one of the significant drawbacks preventing them from participating as they are aware of the risk involved and the extent to which the political elite will go to covert power for themselves.

2.3.9 Electoral Malpractice

Election is a process in which people vote and elect a candidate to represent them at the state and federal levels (Ali et al., 2018). Also, Olurode, (2013) pointed out that if electoral policies are effective and transparent, an election represents functional democracy. In the case of Nigeria, elections are far from fair and transparent (Udu, 2015). The institution responsible for overseeing electoral activities in Nigeria is the National Electoral Commission (INEC); over the years, the body has committed and promised improvement in the electoral process. However, the situation has gotten worse due to an increase in violence and terrorism often perpetuated by political thugs.

Other challenges INEC faces include internal struggle within the organization, political influence in its operation and corruption in the leadership of the organization (Udu, 2015, p. 96). Political influence and wealth are interconnected in Nigeria, and due to the corruption of the electoral process of Nigeria, gender equality is not a priority to decision-makers in Nigeria. According to Ushe (2019), due to the expensive cost of running political campaigns and bribing political party leaders, women can not compete with male counterparts who are mostly influential and

powerful. In addition, the hierarchy in political parties also limits women's influence in the political structure, which hinders them from aiming for nomination during the elections (Ushe, 2019).

The structured subtopics address the key challenges affecting women's political representation in Nigeria. The social expectation of women, which is shaped by patriarchy, and the dangers involved in the political process of Nigeria pose a participation risk to women. Although the international communities have clearly stated the importance of equality in democracy and the Nigerian constitution affirms equal representation in decision-making processes. Nevertheless, women's participation and representation continue to decline. Women are half the total population of Nigeria, and their participation can result in the gradual development of Nigerian democracy. Furthermore, women play a significant role at home and contribute significantly to the economy; if such organizational skills can be ushered into politics, Nigeria will emerge in a new light and will have a positive footing in the international community.

3. Methodology And Methods

This study utilizes qualitative research and employs phenomenology as the methodology. The reason for using the phenomenology methodological approach is to understand the lived experiences of individuals, particularly the challenges women face in participating in Nigerian politics. This study sought to explore the factors that hinder women's participation in Nigeria through the lived experience and views of women in Nigerian politics.

Respondents were selected purposively, and data were collected through interviews with the four respondents invited for this research. Additionally, I employed the feminist perspective to analyze power dynamics and hierarchical awareness during the interview. I transcribed the interview verbatim and analyzed the data using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Finally I discuss the results using the themes that emerged from the respondent's experience.

3.1 Research Methodology

This study utilizes qualitative research design as a strategy to provide solutions to the research question. Qualitative methods involve collecting data non-numerically (Bryman, 2016). Furthermore, qualitative methods are based on formulating meaning to a phenomenon through words expressed by an individual under study. Therefore, I employed phenomenology as the primary research methodology to conceptualize my research. According to Cresswell (2013, p 76) phenomenological study aims to describe the commonality in the experience of several individuals who have lived through a specific event. Furthermore, a vital aspect of the approach is "bracketing", in which the researcher sets aside their preconceptions and biases to understand these experiences (Bryman, 2016, pg 30). Therefore, utilizing this approach to women's political participation in Nigeria can provide the commonalities in women's experience on the factors hindering their success in Nigerian politics (Cresswell, 2013).

3.2 My Role as a researcher

Also I considered my position as a researcher, as my personal perspective can influence my understanding of the research topic and influence the research process. My interest in this topic started following the last Nigerian election in 2023. The result of the election mirrored the ongoing trend of low representation of women in elected positions in Nigeria. The societal issue motivated me to conduct research and explore the root causes of this issue. Based on my personal research and understanding of Nigeria society, I could comprehend the realities of women in Nigeria politics, these ideas influenced my interest and the approach I took in this study. However, my knowledge of this phenomenon is primarily derived from literature, newspapers and a general awareness of Nigerian society. Therefore the lived experience and perspectives of women in Nigeria politics may differ, and requires a distinct approach.

The respondents selected for the interview in this research are all women. Bryman (2016) noted, Introducing a feminist approach to the qualitative method through structured interviews allowed respondents (women) to express their opinions and experience. Therefore, a women-centered approach was employed to understand and discuss the questions set for the interview. The reason for this approach is I am a Male researcher, and my perspectives differ from that of the female respondents. As a result the research and interview questions were centered around understanding the experience of women in Nigeria politics. Introducing a Feminist perspective can also create awareness of possible power imbalances between the interviewer and the respondents (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007, p 200, Bryman 2016, p 411).

According to Doucet & Mauthner (2008, p 333), the researcher should also be aware of structural characteristics and emphasis on a non-hierarchical interview. Therefore, the structuring of the questions were made for respondents to feel comfortable and respond based on their capabilities. The interview questions were brief and simple which gave the respondents the flexibility to share their experiences. Also, during the interview I communicated clearly and “bracket” myself from any biases and preconceptions (Bryman, 2016), instead I positioned myself as a researcher genuinely interested in understanding the phenomenon being studied.

3.3 How The Respondents Were Selected

In this study purposive sampling was utilized to select participants in this research. Bryman (2016) noted that the Purposive technique is a non-random sampling technique that can be used to select participants based on specific criteria that are relevant to the research questions. Therefore a researcher must be strategic and intentional in the selection of participants as their experience and knowledge must be relevant to the study. Based on this assertion, I set a criteria for the selection of the respondents in this research. In the process of selection, Snowballing technique was employed. Snowballing sampling is a technique that starts with the research selecting a small group of individuals relevant to the research questions. These participants are then asked to invite other people who also fulfill the research criteria and have the experience relevant to the study (Bryman, 2016, p. 434; Goodman, 1961, p 148; Besen-Cassino & Cassino, 2017, p 303). This process was applied in inviting participants to this study and to ensure that I reach the expected number of respondents.

I contacted the first participant through a political party platform in Nigeria. I told her I am researching women's political participation in Nigeria, she was eager to participate and I asked her if she could refer to a female member belonging to the same political party who would be interested in participating in my research. Through her, I was in touch with two women from the same political party as they have the general experience of unequal political representation of women in Nigeria. The respondents have years of experience since they've been active in politics for years. Therefore, they are possible candidates to understand the research topic and the questions set for the semi-structured interview. The women also recommended a few more of their peers belonging to and actively participating in the same political party. They have also represented their constituents at the local level, which further makes them knowledgeable, experienced and helpful for this interview.

Around ten potential participants were contacted through the referrer, the size of the respondents was further narrowed down after strictly considering the criteria i set for this study. Factors such as availability and personal choices regarding participation were put into consideration during the selection process. Some women decided not to participate due to personal reasons. After

careful evaluation only four women were selected as respondents for the interview. While the size of the respondents might be small, the selected respondents were chosen based on their availability and relevance to the research on factors affecting women's political participation in Nigeria politics.

3.4 Study Population

The scope of this study is confined to Lagos state and the respondents I contacted are all residing in Lagos state. The reason why I limited the study area is because Lagos state is widely known as the most diverse state in Nigeria. Lagos state demographic comprises people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in Nigeria. Therefore, the views of the selected respondents hailing from Lagos is crucial for understanding women's political participation in Nigeria. Furthermore, the Lagos state political settings make it significant to this research, as the Lagos state political sphere attracts people from different parts of Nigeria. Although Lagos may not represent and reflect the political situation of the 36 states of Nigeria. However, the state can serve as a microcosm of Nigeria's political landscape and contextualize women's political participation due to its diverse population and its influence on Nigeria politics.

In the process of setting criteria for the selection of respondents for the interview, several factors were considered to ensure the aim of the study is fulfilled. The first criteria is that all respondents have to be women, since the goal of the research is to understand the factors contributing to the low political participation of women in Nigeria. Also, it was required that the respondents fall within the age range of 25 to 35 years, as younger people within this age group are likely to have an understanding of the ongoing political landscape in Nigeria. The respondents within this age group may be active in political activism and advocacy efforts which can provide relevant information on different policies that are aimed at improving women's political participation in Nigeria.

The participants' level of education was also considered during the selection process. Possessing a higher education was deemed essential for effective communication during the interview since

the entirety of the interview would be conducted in English. The goal of these criteria is to foster a smooth dialog about the respondents' experiences within the Nigeria political sphere.

Respondents demographic

Respondents	Age	Education
Interviewee 1	25 to 30	Higher Education
Interviewee 2	25 to 30	Bachelor's Degree
Interviewee 3	30 to 35	Bachelor's Degree
Interviewee 4	30 to 35	Bachelor's Degree

In conclusion, the selected respondents belong to political parties with active members in all the states of Nigeria. Their views and experience are therefore relevant to understanding women's political participation in Nigeria at the national level. It is to be noted the respondents selected are educated women and their experience may not fully reflect those of older or less educated women in Nigeria, which can be seen as a limitation. The scope of the study, focusing specifically on Lagos state further narrows the vantage point to a particular area which might be different from that of women from other states. These limitations will be discussed in the limitation section of this research.

3.5 Data collection

Byrman (2006) noted that the researcher must interpret through the vantage point of the people under study in a qualitative method. Furthermore, direct participation is the only way to access respondents' minds to acquire the knowledge and data needed to answer the research questions proposed in this study (Bryman, 2006). Therefore, the researcher gathered the needed data through direct involvement in the fieldwork to get a clearer perspective on the investigated subject.

The data was collected through interviews with four women who are participating in Nigeria politics. The interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams and Zoom from Finland due to lack of funding to cover travel expenses to Nigeria. The entirety of the interview was conducted in English and the respondents spoke English throughout the interview.

Based on Byrman's points, I participated directly in the data acquisition process as I wanted to understand women's experiences participating in politics, speak in their own words and utilize the perspectives they provided. The interview was structured in alignment with the topic and the research question. I structured the interview questions in order for the women to share their experiences. However the interviews took a different direction, as most of the time the respondent had answered the subsequent question before completing the ones asked. Although I had prepared myself for this in case the interview took a different turn. As a result new themes emerged as some of the respondents shared their experiences which shedd lights on the unexplored aspect of the topic. Each of the interviews lasted between 20 to 30 minutes and throughout these interactions respondents engaged thoughtfully with subsequent questions. Consequently, the overall data gathered from these interviews consisted of approximately one hour and 20 minutes of materials. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the respondents and transcribed after I completed the interviews. Simultaneously, the data was stored on the computer.

3.6 Data Analysis

The phenomenological method allows individuals under study to share their experiences and perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p 57). In the same breath, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) can help explore the participant's view of the phenomenon being researched. Smith et al. (1999) noted that the approach is distinct because it concerns the participant's perceptions of an event instead of an effort to produce an objective statement. Based on these assertions, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) by Smith, Jarman & Osborn (1999) was employed as a guide for this analysis section.

This analysis model proposes an idiographic approach, in which the researcher starts by examining the details of transcripts to identify commonalities before moving on to more general categorizations (JSmith et al. 1999 pg 220). Furthermore, the researcher needs to reread the transcripts closely to synchronize with the data, as each reading will likely provide new insights into the research. Hence, the interpretation of the phenomena in this research aims to provide an understanding of the challenges to women's political participation in Nigeria through the lived experiences of Nigerian women.

The analysis proceeds with a verbatim transcription of the recorded interview. After the transcription using the Microsoft Transcription tool, I spent time reading through the transcripts multiple times and making some notes of significant words, keywords and statements that align with the scope of the topic. The statements were then turned into themes, and I proceeded to look for connections within them. I also noted the similarities and differences in the themes from what the participants said, and I came up with new themes that put together the statements and keywords that were previously observed. I made a list of the emerging themes and arranged them coherently.

The goal of the analysis process is for me to understand what every respondent expressed for unambiguous interpretation. To arrange the themes in an orderly manner, I decided to use the master themes as the topic of discussion. The analysis discussion of the master themes was supported with direct quotations from the participant's narratives. The direct quotations reflect the respondent's experiences and their views on the phenomenon being researched.

To gain multiple perspectives and validation of the data, I introduced "Triangulation". Byrman (pg 392) noted that triangulation is a process of using different sources of data in the study of social phenomena, in which several sources of data are utilized to improve validations and confidence in the findings. Therefore, sources such as literature within the scope of the study were introduced to substantiate the data extracted from the respondents.

3.7 Challenges/Limitations

Several challenges emerged during the data collection process. The study area is Nigeria, but traveling to research on the ground was impossible due to financial challenges. Therefore, I had to collect my data from my home in Finland. Also, there were data issues and the internet cost for the respondent, meaning we could not make a video call; instead, I conducted audio interviews. The challenge of sourcing respondents is why the sample size was limited to four people, as the interview was conducted online on Zoom and Microsoft Call and not face to face. Scheduling time with selected respondents was challenging as they all have tight schedules, work, and personal responsibilities, which hindered them from setting mutually convenient times.

Another limitation was the limited diversity of the respondents as the precondition criteria were educated women actively participating in Nigerian politics and possessing the knowledge and experience needed for the data collection. Therefore the research did not include the opinion and experience of women with lower education backgrounds. Also, this interview was conducted online, presenting issues such as internet disruption. Sometimes, we have to recall and redial multiple times before getting connected. Additionally, a respondent encountered technical challenges with Microsoft Teams, which prompted us to seek alternative communication platforms like Zoom.

3.8 Ethical consideration

I had to consider all ethics during this research, as my responsibilities included participant privacy and data protection. Therefore, the guidelines for the ethical protection of the participants were followed through the supervisor's guide. I did not subject any participant to risk or harm, as all the respondents were informed about the purpose of this research and were invited voluntarily. I sent the participants a consent form containing the goal of my research, how the research will be conducted and how their privacy and confidentiality will be protected. The consent of the participants was also asked before proceeding with the interview and I informed them that their participation was voluntary. I informed them they could discontinue participation at any time during the interview if they felt discomfort, and they approved it before recording the interview.

The reason for this process was for the participant to feel safe and comfortable knowing that all their privacy and responses were kept safe. Also, during the interview, no personal data was asked as it was not required in this research, and all the names of the participants were replaced with aliases for anonymity purposes. All the consent forms and the recorded interviews were stored correctly in a secured and password-protected folder on the computer for the duration of this research. All noted recordings and transcripts will be destroyed ethically as soon as the research is complete according to the rules and guide of Tampere University.

In order to have clarity and grammar accuracy in this study, I utilized www.grammarly.com, which is an AI language editing tool (Fitria, 2021). Grammarly was used in the process of writing and revising my thesis to help identify and correct grammar error, also improve my sentence structure and the readability of my research, these are the steps that I followed in utilizing grammarly.com

Draft phase: after writing and citing each section of the thesis, I run the text through Grammarly to identify grammar, punctuation and spelling errors. These checks helped to clean the text and ensure basic accuracy. Also grammar was used for structural adjustment to improve the flow of the writings.

Final review: I conducted a full check of my thesis on grammarly to correct errors, this final review was done to make sure that my research was free of any typo errors or punctuation issues. Overall the use of grammarly.com contributed to the quality of my work through sentence correction and highlighting error and contributed to the flow of my research (Fitria, 2021).

4. Results

This section will discuss the result of the analysis, the respondents share the challenges women faced when participating in politics in Nigeria. In their responses some concepts of patriarchy were repeated multiple times in the interview and were used to explain the societal expectation of women. Other themes that surfaced during the code phase were “lack of support, societal perception of women, empowerment of women, oppression and marginalization and gender matters in politics”. Also the respondents were asked if there are policies aimed at improving women’s participation in politics, and how effective were the implementation of the policies.

The themes gathered from the data show the gender inequalities in Nigerian politics, as the respondents in this interview strongly affirm the claim. They explain that men highly dominate the political sphere and are patriarchal in their views towards women’s participation. These are barriers causing the underrepresentation of women in politics. Also the respondents express that education and empowerment are significant tools women need to improve their position in Nigeria politics. Some of the respondents affirm that some of the policies aimed at improving women’s participation are effective, however others argue that the programs are not effective because women’s overall participation is yet to improve.

4.1 Women's Societal Expectations

During the interview, the response reflects the feminist idea that women are marginalized because of their gender. The phrase "women have to" appears in all the interviews. This theme connotes the social expectations of women and it shows that women are not free to choose how they want to live or what they want to do. Instead, they have to conform to societal norms. All the respondents affirm this point, they talked about how the wider expectation of women is just to participate only in domestic activities, they are not expected to dream beyond being married and taking care of the household. Such societal views have continued to keep women in a position of disadvantage in every sphere of Nigeria society. All the respondents are fully aware

of this situation and strongly believe that it contributes to why women are not equally represented in Nigeria politics.

Respondent 2: Often, we are not expected to join politics; they believe we should be full housewives. Our husbands should be responsible for the work and bring us money to cook. We are not just made for cooking food and caring for the household. We should be allowed to participate in politics like men, also we should be allowed to showcase our skills and knowledge.

This response reflects the frustration of women who are interested in participating in politics. It also highlights their eagerness to contribute to the politics of Nigeria.

Respondent 3: I decided not to conform to society's expectations, and I have my way of making my voice heard. I will not be silenced, and I will not tolerate any form of disrespect. My party members know what I stand for, and they know I will not subdue myself to any form of intimidation. Is it because I am a woman that cannot have a voice? I refuse to let anyone decide how I live in Nigeria.

The response from respondent 3 reflects the conflict between societal norms and the ambition of women who would like to pursue endeavors beyond the traditional expectations.

Respondent 4: Women are seen as lesser human to men, and they believe the terrain of politics is not meant for women, women are seen as second class citizens and we are not seen as equal to the men. We are expected to just be the caretakers, and cheering the men. Anything that involves taking control or taking charge, we are expected to refrain from it. This has been the situation for a very long time and there hasn't been any reasonable changes.

Respondent 3 The society of Nigeria is not a society that allows or gives women chances. I don't like to use the word allow when it comes to women issues, but it's actually our reality. It's some kind of society that does not allow women to try anything outside the norm. It's some kind of society that does not allow women to have dreams outside the kitchen and making homes. So

Nigeria is a society that is deeply patriarchal. So I think it would take an extra extra extra effort on the part of the women to be able to actually participate in politics. You know, it's the kind of society that has indoctrinated the men and the women to believe that, oh, the men have a place where they are expected to be just because they are men and then the women have a place where they are expected to be just because they are women.

The responses from the women show their level of awareness of the society's perception, and their swift articulation of these views shows that defying these norms is a tough task. The society doesn't believe in women's capabilities in politics, the political sphere is meant for men, while domestic activities are for women, such a mindset is influenced by the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society (Respondent 1, 2, 3, 4). The women's responses suggest that these societal attitudes are deeply intertwined with culture and religion. So confronting these issues is challenging because of the collective mind set of the society. These factors highlight that if women want to challenge these norms, they have to go against not only cultural traditions but also religious beliefs (Respondent 2,3).

These issues echo the liberal feminist point of equality and freedom of choice for women. The respondents aligned with these views and expressed the daily barriers they face in a society when diverting from the set norms. The expectations for women are part of the major themes that emerged from the data. In Nigeria society, women's primary role is caregiving and a subject of male authority (Ushe, 2019 p 128). Therefore the expectation of women's participation has often been subdued by societal norms that give men priority and dominance. Women that decided to challenge these ideas by joining politics are often scrutinized. Moreover, these societal critiques stem from cultural beliefs that decide how women should behave and conduct themselves. Perception of femininity in most Nigeria cultures emphasize modesty and submission that is in contrast to the assertiveness and control that politics requires. Based on this common point of view, politics is seen as an arena not befitting for a proper woman (Ushe, 2019).

4.2 Gender bias

When asked about the factors influencing women's low participation in politics, the respondents say that intimidation and gender bias is mostly common at the party level, most of the leaders of the political parties are men and they are mostly uncomfortable to see women in positions of influence. The respondents assert that members mostly appoint men in key positions within the party, and often leave women with mediocre positions. This system of gender bias hinders women's ability to shape their political parties agendas and policies, as a result women remain underrepresented in crucial positions and their perspectives remain weakened.

Respondent 2: A female political leader in one of our political party branches was elected to head the party. She faced different challenges at the earliest period of her leadership because the majority of men within the party failed to endorse her. Although She's doing well now as the men in the party had to adapt to her being the chair lady. Before that, she received threats from members asking her to relinquish her position and let a man be the party lead, and she should stay in the position of deputy. However, she did not cede to their threat. She overcame and remained the lead, although she still struggles with having some of her policies implemented.

This point connotes the gender bias and intimidation women face in political parties. The respondents noted that despite women's active involvement in party politics and their ability to occupy prominent positions within the parties, they continue to get sidelined.

Respondent 2 pointed out that favoritism exists in the political parties and it is evident within the political party hierarchy mostly occupied by men. Male members receive preferential support when it comes to assuming leadership positions while women get ill treated if they make an effort. This choice for male dominance reflects the gender inequality present within the parties and it also undermines women efforts within the political parties.

Respondent 3 There was a time I was elected as the local government secretary. However, a man stood up and said no, she can not be a secretary. Why would you nominate a woman when there are men? instead of women within the party to support me and stand ground, instead They decided to support the men's stance. They proceeded with canceling the position, and I was okay with it. But looking at how fellow women within the party didn't support me is sad. But I won't let that deter me from pursuing what I believe in. Now, I am a secretary in a different political party in Lagos state.

To further elaborate on this point, the theme of gender bias is one of the key reasons women are not participating in Nigeria politics. Women are not expected to lead or to be in position of power or influence in Nigeria, also patriarchal society assigns gender roles which designate women to position lower to that of men. This reflects in the number of women holding political positions in Nigeria, most of the positions women held in Nigeria politics are mostly appointed with little to none in elected positions which are tightly controlled by men, and in cases where women are in election position their voices and policies are mostly sidelined (Agbalajobi, 2010).

Failure to promote female candidacy at the primary level contributes to the poor performances of women in Nigeria politics (Ugwu & Okoye, 2022). Major political parties in Nigeria often give 90 percent of their election tickets to male members, significantly disadvantaging women. Although women participate actively during the party campaigns and mobilization of voters. However they get sidelined during the candidate selection process (Ugwu & Okoye, 2022).

On the same note, Ugwu, & Okoye,(2022) blame political parties in Nigeria for not following the principles of democracy, particularly in their treatment of female party members. Female candidates often get intimidated and attacked if they are not willing to substitute for their male counterparts especially when they win in the party primaries. These attitudes within parties prevent women from improving their position within their parties hierarchy as all positions of influence are reserved for men (Ugwu & Okoye, 2022).As a result women find themselves excluded from opportunities to secure nomination for political positions and get elected to government offices.

4.3 Cultural taboos

This theme developed within the societal perception of women, the mind set of many Nigerians on politics is “dirty game” which pitches people against each other, also it forces close interaction between men and women, which is culturally frowned upon and seen as indecency of women participating in politics. Nigeria is a country where religion and culture shapes how people think and how people behave Furthermore, politics requires different forms of activities and engagement. For women to participate effectively means they have to take trips for campaigns and attend party meetings which are sometimes held at late hours of the night. Such activities are not widely accepted in Nigeria especially when carried out by women.

Respondent 1: we are not expected to join politics and we are seen as prostitute when we join them in politics, people believe politician are thugs and we all know about the corrupting common within politics, so this is the same eyes they look at people in politics, so when you tell people publicly that you are into politics, their reaction is strange, they have this look like what are you doing there? So this kind of mindset prevents most women from joining politics, they see it as an arena where women should not be part of.

According to Ushe, (2019 p 119), politics in Nigeria is a system where manipulation and strategic maneuvering is more important to politicians than to upholding moral principles. It's a system that thrives on exploitation of the general public and intimidation of political opponents to push political agendas (Ushe, 2019). This grim reality of politics in Nigeria, has shaped how people view politics in Nigeria, also it serves as a deterrent preventing women from participation in politics.

Nigeria is a country that is influenced by religion and culture, both of these ideas shape people's beliefs, behaviors and outlook. This is evident in how most people perceive female politicians. These perceptions stem from the immorality that characterizes Nigeria politics, where corrupting, manipulation and exploitation are common occurrences. Aware of these systemic issues within Nigeria politics, people believe women shouldn't be part of these immoral acts as it does not match with cultural norms and religious teachings.

The respondents are aware of these issues within politics because women get the most push back, women are often expected to adhere to traditional roles and maintain virtue behavior (Ushe, 2019). In addition, religious teachings in Nigeria, be it christianity or islam often preach the importance of integrity and righteousness which further strengthen the idea that politics is not an activity women should participate in.

4.4 Political Games

Politics in Nigeria is an avenue where people pursue and prioritize their own individual interest over the welfare of the citizens, the respondent been part of politics themselves understand the games and tactic commonly used in the political sphere, they emphasized that in order to be successful in Nigeria politics, you have to use the strategies other politicians use. The wider society benefits don't matter, instead politicians have to meet and fulfill some group interest, these groups are the ones that fund politicians (Abdulkadir, 2023). Therefore, politics is seen as an area where you can amass wealth, so everyone competes for government positions through any means necessary to secure political power. As a result politics become a game of profit with little regard for ethical implication or the well-being of the wider public (Abdulkadir, 2023).

Respondent 3: To make way as a woman in Nigerian politics, you have to be ready to go the extra mile because anywhere you go to propose your idea, you will meet the men there. Also you have to be ready to join the men in every activity they participate in. Therefore, as a woman, you have to join the men to bribe and lie. If you can't play the game of manipulation and engage in men 's activities, then it's not possible to be successful politically in Nigeria .

Interviewer: So you mean most female politicians had to play this game, too?

Respondent 3: yes definitely, why do you think we do not have many women in positions of power in politics. It's because most women are not ready to play the game like men. So, if you want to make a way, you have to play the game.

In essence, the respondents' points paint the reality of Nigeria politics, where accumulation of wealth and self interest is prioritized above serving the citizens. Respondent 3 pointed out that the reason why women are not common in positions of power in Nigeria politics, is because they are not willing to go to the extreme lengths male politicians go through. She pointed out that you have to be ready to participate in the manipulation of the general public. Politics is a game of gain and most women are not willing to go through these extreme lengths.

4.5 Courageous to participate

The respondent mentioned that women need to be courageous to participate in Nigerian politics due to institutional barriers existing in the system that discourage participation women encounter different systemic barriers both at the party level and national level politics. They discussed how few women who had attained success in politics had to go through institutional hurdles and challenges. The respondents gave examples of women's challenges in the male-dominated sphere.

Respondent 3: *The current minister for women's affairs Uju Kennedy-Ohanenye was courageous enough to contest for the presidential nomination in the political party primary. She would have had a chance at the presidency if she won the party nomination slot. Like what I have mentioned during the course of this interview, she had to give up her ticket, so she dropped out of the presidential race. But now she is the newly appointed minister of women's affairs in Nigeria.*

This response reflects the policies within political parties that hinders women from progressing politically. The policies existing within the political parties are designed to favor the men, women have to adhere to it even if it jeopardizes their political ambition. These issues are rooted in the exclusion of women during the creation of these policies, resulting in systemic barriers that hinders their political advancement within political parties.

Interviewer: But her current position is an appointed position, not elected.

Respondent 3: *yes, it's not an elected position, but I like her, and I find her courageous because for her to contest in a political party like APC means she's courageous, and she's even rich*

enough to pay the 100 million naira nomination ticket, she deserves an applause. Most women can't even make waves within the APC political party because men dominate the party and for her to contest for the presidency slot took a lot of guts.

Respondent 3 still finds Uju Kennedy-Ohanenye effort courageous as not many have been able to aspire for presidency in Nigeria politics. The fact that she expressed her interest and also competed in the nomination process is viewed as breaking boundaries for women within politics.

Respondent 4: *Natasha apoki is a good example of a women who decided to defied the odds and contested for senatorial seat, she won against her male opponent who was disqualified by the election tribunal, she was threatened and attacked many times, however she did not stop, the court of appeal declared her winner and she retained her mandate, now she's part of the senate and she serves as motivation for women that no matter the challenges, women can also be successful in Nigeria politics.*

Women in Nigeria need to be courageous in order to participate and compete in the male dominated sphere, the respondent pointed out that women who chose to participate are always confronted with various challenges, not limited to gender bias and discrimination within political parties. Also they explained the experience of female politicians and the institutional barriers they faced even when they are elected to political seats, in some circumstances their mandate gets recovated (Odisu, 2020). However some women continue to emerge despite the constraints, Mrs Natasha Akpoti who is the current Senator representing Kogi central in Nigeria senate and many others continue to overcome these hurdles (Odisu, 2020). These women are driven by a desire to effect positive change that is why they did not get discouraged despite the institutional challenges they face. Their determination serves as motivation and inspiration to other women in politics.

4.6 Women's view of Female Politicians

How Nigerian women view female politicians vary widely, and their views are influenced mostly by cultural norms and personal experience which reflects in their voting attitudes. Some women view female politicians as inspirational figures, while others reject them. Also, within political parties some women harbor skepticism and question the sincerity of other female politicians. Mostly if they notice they conform to traditional power structures in politics and by failing to address women's issues (Ushe, 2019).

Respondent 3: people don't trust politician, when you tell people that you are a politician they don't take you serious, and most women in Nigeria think women in politics are prostitute or thieves, there is some level of disdain for female politician as they see it as an activity women should not be part of.

In Nigeria, the cultural perception of women is not only from men, It also manifests in women's views of female politicians. Most women in Nigeria view female politicians as incapable. Also, they perceive women in politics as promiscuous and rebellious; the perception is that politics is male-dominated, so for any woman to excel, she must have sold her integrity and not have a responsible husband (Igbolekwu et al., 2023, p 19). Instead of receiving appraisal for being courageous, they get called derogatory names and abusive language. These issues manifest from female voters and within political parties where women do not support other women pursuing candidacy and influential political positions (Igbolekwu et al., 2023).

4.7 Women support within political parties

The respondents pointed to the lack of support from women within the same political parties. They stress that women have accepted to take the back seat, conforming to the idea that they should not take prominent roles in any of the party activities. This self imposed relegation has led women to create a space for themselves within parties, where they serve only in supportive roles and cheerlead the men, while leaving the men to dominate the affairs of the political parties and in the government.

Respondent 2, shared her experience that women within the party do not support each other as they have conformed with the norm of cheering men, and settling for mediocre positions designated only for women instead of competing for positions where they can make real impact and represent the interests of women.

Respondent 2: women in politics usually settle for positions like women leaders; this kind of position doesn't have meaning, which is why women voters don't take us seriously. Women within the political parties accept such roles and settle with them instead of demanding prominent positions.

Women in Nigeria often do not see themselves as relevant instruments of politics and national progress (USSE). Based on this mindset, their participation remained low with only few women contesting for elective positions. Instead, most women within political parties limit their political involvement to supporting men's leadership and accepting appointments to political positions. Such an approach to political engagement does not only limit women's chances of progressing in the male dominated society, it also supports the culture of reducing women to mediocre roles (Respondent 2). Ushe, (2019) noted that many women in Nigeria see politics as a dirty game, characterized by all forms of electoral violence which discourages women from actively participating in politics as they feel ill equipped to handle the risk involved with political engagements.

4.8 Violence in Politics

Violence has become a norm in Nigeria politics and it manifests in different forms which reflects the deeply ingrained gender inequalities and power dynamics within the system. These violences ranges from physical assault, online intimidation and institutional harassment. All the respondents voiced their concerns about the violence that happens towards women in politics and in many times discourage them from political activities. Also the respondents affirm that violence is used as a means of deterrence to prevent women from participation in politics.

Respondent 1: *politics attracts trouble in Nigeria; during political campaigns and rallies, we always have to be vigilant; although I am always careful, and I haven't been personally attacked, I know of cases of women who are victims of this attack, so women in politics have to be extra cautious because you can never predict what can happen to you.*

Respondent 2: *intimidation is widespread in Nigerian politics, and by now, I am used to it; you get called names, you get harassed, and in some cases, you get attacked, but at some point, it becomes the norm. Women are prone to such attacks, and they use them to discourage us; that's why you see today that many women are not interested in politics.*

Interviewer: *Yes, even men are afraid of participating in Nigerian politics because we hear cases of people being attacked and, in some severe cases, getting killed.*

Respondent 2: *Yes, that is why women stay away from political activities and the more you grow in politics, the more you see. There have been many cases of women being attacked and injured. There was a case of how Natasha Akpoki was attacked in her bid for a political seat; opposition party thugs harassed and attacked her in order for her to forfeit her political ambitions. There are other unreported cases because if they report no one will take them seriously anyways.*

Respondent 3: *many times, even in party meetings, you get attacked verbally and physically because you disagree with ideas and policies. And in some wild cases, political opposition attacks, but mostly during election periods. It's terrifying and discouraging when we watch the news of political attacks happening in different regions of Nigeria. It strikes fear into our minds, but we will continue doing our best and protecting ourselves. I think the awareness of the possibilities of violence is what is keeping us safe.*

Expanding on the respondents' experiences and the literature on women participation in Nigeria politics, it is evident that political violence prevents women from voting. According to Onwudiwe,& Berwind-Dart, (2010), since Nigeria became a democracy in 1960, violence has become a norm in every electoral activities and Nigerian politicians have become accustomed to electoral fraud and malpractices. Furthermore, Nigeria women have been denied the right of

citizenship. International observers such as Freedom house had declared the situation worse and undemocratic (Onwudiwe,& Berwind-Dart, 2010).

The respondents express their views that because of this violence, more women are needed in politics to tackle this issue of political violence that continues to plague Nigeria democratic settings.

4.9 Women's Self-Esteem in Politics

The lack of confidence among women in politics has a significant impact on women's political participation. The issue stems from a cultural norm that undermines women's capabilities in assuming leadership or decision roles in politics. Nigerian society prioritizes male leadership in every sphere and perpetuates the idea that women are less capable. Such ideas deter women from participating in politics as they have been made to believe only men belong in politics and decision making positions.

Respondent 2: from my personal experience and observation, women are seen as lesser in value than men when it comes to politics, and women have also conceded to the idea that men should be the lead. Women believe men can do it, and it could be due to intimidation, so they do not put effort into it. Most women feel lesser of themselves; they feel inferior, and they suffer from an inferiority complex. I am a woman; what am I going to do? What impact can I make? This is the mindset of women in Nigerian politics. Things must change, and women must understand that Nigeria's politics needs both genders because men can not do it alone; even women can not do it alone. We have to come together and make things work out. When you hear the name of a party chair in political parties, it's only men, never women; even the women stay away as they don't feel the need to chair or lead their parties. However, in my current political party, we have decided to unite. Also, we have a woman who is a local government chair in Lagos, and she's doing well.

Most women in Nigerian politics lack confidence in their ability and capacity to lead. such a mindset hinders women's political participation. Ushe (2019) noted that most women in Nigeria believe politics is an endeavor reserved for men and feel it's not something they should partake

in. Moreover, many women do not believe in the leadership skills of female politicians. Factors such as envy and jealousy and the perception that women in politics lack integrity often lead them to prefer voting for men (Ushe, 2019). Consequently, many women decide not to affirm themselves in politics because of backlash and failure. Such lack of confidence impedes women's political aspiration and deprives the larger society of governance skills women can offer. In turn these attitudes often give men the advantage in mobilizing support for themselves during elections.

4.10 Poverty limits Participation

Poverty has a significant restraints on women in Nigeria as it prevents them from engaging meaningfully in politics. In Nigeria, poverty affects women the most as it limits their access to education and economic opportunities. The respondent emphasized the impact of poverty on women's political participation.

Respondent 3: The way the Nigeria economy works, you have to struggle before meeting ends means, in some cases, to get food. So it's impossible for a hungry person to think or dream. You can dream of making a meaningful impact even at the local level. Many Nigerians are poor, and according to various reports, a large percentage of Nigeria live in multidimensional poverty, and out of those numbers of the poor, women have the highest percentage. Women suffer on all fronts, they have no access to good health care, education and basic amenities humans need for survival.

Respondent 4: *As a woman in Nigeria, you are most likely to be poor in all aspects of life. Healthcare, education, basic amenities like water, food, good roads, housing and all of that. So women are the poorest. also, for somebody who has to wake up in the morning to take care of the home as expected by society and to bear children and then they have to go to work in the morning and that is for those who have actual jobs. Some of most of them are petty traders. Some of them sell in traffic and then they have to go back home again to use what they have earned to care for themselves and family. That kind of woman cannot think or aspire to be involved in*

politics, all that they care about at that point is survival. They just want to eat, they just want to live by the day. So poverty is one of the challenges to women's political participation in Nigeria.

One of the barriers to women's active political participation in Nigeria is poverty. The respondents highlighted poverty as a contributing factor to the issue, noting that most women in Nigeria live below the poverty line (Respondent 3). The daily struggle to fulfill basic needs for themselves and family prevents them from politics (Ette, & Akpan-Obong, 2023). Due to women's lack of economic power, they are easily sidelined from political processes. Therefore, Increase in women's income can enhance their confidence to compete with men politically. Most women with financial capabilities have less difficulties participating in politics and are likely not to be exploited or intimidated by male politicians (Luka, 2011).

4.11 Empowering women

When asked about the effectiveness of policies and programs aimed at improving women's political participation, the respondents have different responses and views on the policies. Respondent 2 believe that the policies from the government and private organization are effective at improving women's participation,

Respondent 1: I have not heard of any policy, even if there are they are not impacting any changes as women's in politics are still low

Respondent 2: Have heard about different policies, but in my own party, we have a policy which emphasizes 50 percent women participation and we are very strict with the policy, also there's a movement called Take It Back, the goal of the movement is to improve women's participation in politics. Also within the objective of the movement is that there is no limit to any position women can attain, therefore as long as women are available to participate they must be equally represented.

Respondent 3: I haven't heard or seen any positive outcomes from any policy. I have heard of some policies but am not sure if they have contributed to women's participation in policies.

Respondent 4: I am not familiar with any policies aimed at increasing women's participation, based on the data online, women's participation are still relatively low

Based on most of the respondents' responses, it's evident that there hasn't been any significant policy aimed at improving women's political participation. Respondent 2 named two policies, one within her political party which guarantees equal representation of women in the party activities and a movement named Take It Back which is also aimed at improving women's participation in politics.

When asked about the success of the policies, most of the few policies available suffer from proper implementation as the aim and goal of the policies does not match with the intention of the policy makers.

Respondent 3: The programs that are put in place with the intention to empower women to participate in politics, are put in place to provide the illusions that they exist. Because if you observe the cost of delivering these programs, you see that it is not actually in the interest of women. The programs are more like fake inclusion, therefore can not yield any useful results. The goal of the policy is they just want to have something to point out to. They want an event where they can take pictures and upload and tag you in women and said ohh we did this for women in Kajola community but go to the actual participants at those programs. Ask them what they got from the program. If they are able to tell you what they got, ask them how they have been able to ask them how it has been beneficial.

Interviewer: Should we say that many or almost all the policies have not been successful?

Respondent 3: They have not been successful and it is not only in political participation, even in all aspects of women's life in Nigeria.

The respondents highlight that the policy makers in Nigeria are mostly men and their intentions are questionable when it comes to promoting women's political participation. Respondent 3 strongly affirmed that the aims of the policies are not towards improving women's participation, rather they are just token gestures targeted at creating an illusion of inclusion. According to the respondents, these programs and policies are created to motivate women to vote or rally support for their political endeavors.

4.12 Corruption within programs

Part of the themes that emerged within the policy and program aimed at improving women's political participation is corruption within the programs and the Ngo responsible for these programs. In the previous themes it is evident that the policy makers are men and because of their individualist and ingenuine interest the policy tends to fail.

Respondent 3: When you go to these programs and then you would see that the organizers of the programs are mostly men. They are men who have become successful in politics just because they are men, not because they are better than the women they are trying to bring on board. And then we have NGO's who also say, ohh, we are doing this for women.. You end up realizing that everybody is just doing it for personal interest. Everybody is just after their pockets. Everybody is after funding and grants. These programs are not intentional, so the implementation cannot be successful. It cannot have effects on the people (women) they say they are doing it for.

Respondent 3 pointed out that corruptions within the Ngo often cause these policies to not materialize, as everyone is looking for ways to accumulate wealth and success for themselves, resulting in these policies not materializing.

4.13 Overcoming the challenges

To improve women's political participation, women need to be ready to challenge the norms and actively educate themselves (Respondent 3). Ushe (2019) noted that education is the bridge to development opportunities, suggesting that gender disparities in Nigeria politics is rooted in

Nigeria education that has continuously marginalized women from development in Nigeria. Discriminatory practices within Nigeria Education have continuously put women at a disadvantage, hindering them from realizing their full potential. Preferences are given to male education over women's education. Women's lack of access to quality education has hindered their potential and also prevented them from contributing to Nigeria politics (Ushe 2019).

Respondent 3: Being a non traditional woman is one of the getaways to get out of these challenges and another thing is education exposure. The education that I'm referring to is not your university degree or the many Masters degrees that you have acquired because we have had a lot of people with PHDs who still have the same mindset as women with no basic primary education. You have to educate yourself, read about other people, what have other people been able to achieve? How did they go about it? How did they work for them? What did they do? What were the sacrifices that needed to be made? Because whether we like it or not, we women will have to make sacrifices. It's not going to come on a platter of gold and in a place like Nigeria, you don't sit at home and ask for freedom. You have to go outside and take it.

Respondent 3 noted that women have to challenge societal norms and realize their place is not limited to the kitchen, instead they have to realize they belong in politics on equal footing as men. Women have to shell away the idea that politics is only meant for men, instead it's their civil rights and responsibilities to participate in Politics and to ensure their voices are heard and their contributions are recognised.

Respondent 4: Women need to understand that their place is not limited to the kitchen. Or the popular belief that they belong in the other room, like our former president said. You need to understand that you are human as much as the other people (Men) in Nigeria. And you have equal opportunities and rights. In fact, Nigerian women do even recognize your rights. talkless of exercising it.

Respondent 4 also affirmed the importance of Nigerian women exercising their rights and actively participating in politics. Women in Nigeria have to do away with the notion that a woman's place is in the confinement of the household. She drew attention to the statement made by the former president of Nigeria, when asked about the role of the first lady. In which he

asserted, “ I don't know which party my wife belongs to but she belongs to my kitchen, my living room and the other room (bedroom) (CNN news 2016). The statement by the former president reflects the prevalent sexism in Nigeria society used to perpetuate gender stereotypes. Such remarks contributed to the societal perception that women's roles in Nigeria should be limited to domestic activities and not participating in public affairs.

4.14 Women in Politics: Serving Personal Interests

Corruption has become a norm within Nigeria society, deeply ingrained in every sector of governance. Corrupt activities are not limited to men, over the years women who have attained positions in Nigeria politics, whether through election or appointment also engage in corrupt practices. They engage in corruption equally as men and they do less in pursuing good governance or advocating for policies that can improve women's participation in politics. Okonkwo,(2016) pointed out that women in positions of power in Nigeria often prioritized their own financial enrichment and political survival which results in a cycle of corruption and impunity. Respondent 3 stresses she does not support women only on the basis of gender, instead she focuses more on what they have to offer because in most cases female politicians are equally corrupt like the male politicians.

Respondent 4: I think one of the problems is that even the few women who are participating in politics are not women's women. They don't even have women's interest at heart. If we have just three women in the House of Representatives, even if the men are fifty, I know what three strong women can achieve in the midst of fifty men. But then we have women who are also capitalists. We have women who also want to extort other women, the women who benefit from the disadvantage of other women are the ones representing women in politics.

The women in politics are not representing Nigeria women, they are representing Nigerian politicians, they are representing capitalism, they are representing their political counterparts. So more like they are also part of the problem instead of solving it.

So it's why I will not just exonerate somebody just because they are a woman. What kind? Of women, are you? Are you a kind of woman that also propagates capitalism? Are you a kind of woman that further reinforces patriarchal norms?

This assertion from respondent 4 explains the wider issue within Nigeria politics, the case of corruption is not limited to men, women are part of the corrupt activities. The pressure to navigate a male dominated political sphere has led some women to compromise their integrity and surrender to corrupt temptations (Okonkwo,2016).

5. Discussions

The phenomenological method applied in this research allowed the respondents to share their lived experiences when participating in Nigerian politics. The study validated the respondent's claims using the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and triangulating the transcribed interview themes with existing literature and theories. This approach provided helpful information that effectively answers the research questions proposed in this research.

The study indicated that the Nigerian government has failed to implement and advance gender equality in key sectors of Nigeria, especially the economy and politics. At the commencement of this research, women are still facing barriers when it comes to political participation. Many international organizations recognize and emphasize the importance of gender equality in society (Ushe, 2019). Furthermore, the Nigeria constitution stipulated that everyone in Nigeria has equal rights; however, women's participation in politics has yet to improve when benchmarked with other African countries.

The studies also show that women are underrepresented in all power structures in Nigeria. Furthermore, research findings show that men highly dominate Nigeria's politics, and the latest election was no different as only a few women were elected to political seats or got appointed positions (Ushe, (2019). According to data from the INEC portal, only 14 women were elected to the House of Representatives, making just under 4 percent of the members, and only four women made it to the Senate, representing just 3.67 percent of 109 members (INEC, 2023).

The findings of this study show that women still face structural barriers in society. Religion and cultural/traditional norms champion male dominance while relegating women's position. This is

due to the impact of the colonial structure, which dismantled the traditional system before colonization (Para-Mallam, 2010). To date, women continue to face challenges and backlash in society due to the mindset of people towards women's participation (Ushe, 2019). Women are not expected to join politics as it is generally seen as an arena for men. Instead, women should only be involved in domestic affairs and taking care of the household (Aja-Okorie, 2013).

The study also reveals that women's lack of access to resources affects their economic autonomy and political expression. This economic marginalization has put them at a disadvantage in Nigerian society, preventing them from equally participating in politics on the same footing as their male counterparts.

Gender bias is still prevalent in Nigeria society, and the respondent has different experiences, which are shaped mainly by their level of political participation, meaning the more women progress politically, the more they are prone to experience different forms of biases in the political party or backlash from the wider society (Ushe, (2019). Some respondents recounted how they were marginalized within their political parties. They also emphasized how men are prioritized for critical positions within the party while sidelining women.

The study also reveals the ineffectiveness of programs and policies to improve women's political participation. The responses from the women varied widely; some mentioned that they had experienced some programs, while some said they had not experienced any programs. The programs the women experienced were mostly from non-profit organizations; the women mentioned that there has yet to be any effective policy from the government to improve women's participation in Politics. Moreover, the few existing programs are not practical because of the corruption within their structure. Furthermore, individualism and personal agenda often affect the objectives of the programs. Many programs have been created to improve women's participation. Examples of such movements are Women in Politics (WIP), the Nigerian Women's Trust Fund (NWTF), and the Take it Back Movement. However, these programs have not improved women's political participation. As suggested in the literature, Okeke-Ihejirika and Franceschet (2002) noted that the lack of a unified women's Movement can prevent women from achieving collective goals. Furthermore, for the women's Movement to be successful, it must rise within an

ideologically driven political framework. Most of the women's Movements in Nigeria lacked ideological purposes, which prevented them from materializing on a political stage.

Conclusion

This research aimed to understand the challenges to women's participation in Nigerian politics. The issues examined are barriers hindering women's participation and the programs targeted at improving participation. Women are not equally represented within the government, impeding the chance of promoting gender equality in the Nigerian government. This study was critical in addressing gender marginalization based on the experiences shared by the women who volunteered to participate in this study. If women are empowered and motivated to participate in politics, they can contribute to the development of Nigeria. Inequalities exist in Nigerian society, and this stems from cultural and traditional norms that have limited women to domestic activities. These societal hindrances have made it difficult for women to access proper education and resources and express themselves politically.

However, changing societal views away from old traditions and culture could redefine gender responsibilities in Nigeria and, in turn, increase women's participation in politics. Also, empowering women could educate them about their rights and demand equal representation in the government. Women share half of the Nigerian population, and if their number can be translated to political participation, they can address broader societal issues that affect them politically and economically.

Limitation of study

A key limitation to this study was the size of the sample. The number of the selected respondents was four which is appropriate for this qualitative research. The data and the result may not be generalized in understanding the condition of all women in Nigeria or the African continent. Furthermore I only focused on women who have participated in politics and belong to some

political party. Therefore their positions might not reflect all the experiences of women participating in politics in Nigeria. Finally, the respondents selected for this study are all younger women and their experience might not reflect the current political condition and situation of women in Nigeria politics. However this research provides direct evidence from Nigeria women concerning their gender marginalization in Nigeria politics.

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Appendix A

Interview Question Guide For Women's Political Participation In Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects.

1. Can you provide your ideas on the current situation of women's level of participation in Nigerian politics? Why do you think the situation is the way it is?
2. From your experiences, what factors prevent women from participating and succeeding in politics in Nigeria? Have you experienced any form of gender biases in Nigerian politics?
3. Do you have examples of a scenario of any form of bias?
4. From your Experiences, are there any cultural factors within political parties that influence the underrepresentation of women in Nigeria politics
5. Have you experienced any successful programs and policies targeted at improving women's political participation? If so, what makes the policies successful?
6. Can you share stories of the challenges you have overcome in Nigerian politics and what lessons women interested in politics can learn from it?