

## **INDIGENEITY CRISIS AND WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA'S 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

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### ***Abstract***

*This study examines the prevailing local practices that marginalize Ebonyi women from participating in politics in the state. Our investigations were predicated on the basic propositions emanating from the indigeneity crisis framework. Issues interrogated in the work include the Ebonyi State Independent National Electoral Commission and some Political Parties which gave some Ebonyi women the ticket to contest in different political positions in the 2015 general elections. The 1979 constitution introduced the concept of 'indigeneity' into Nigerian public law to guarantee a fair regional distribution of power. Over the years, the principle has been subverted to discriminate against Nigerian citizens who are not indigenous to the places where they live, work, and marry. Women married to men who are non-indigenes of their local governments suffer discrimination. In their own constituencies, they are told that by marrying out, they have lost their indigeneity; in their husband's constituency, they are told they do not really belong because indigeneity is based on the consanguinity principle. At the end of the study, it was noted among others that the systematic entrenchment of practices aimed at the continued marginalization of Ebonyi women in the political process must stop and that the regulatory framework for the establishment and entrenchment of indigeneity into the political process should be reviewed to ensure a higher rate of women participation in subsequent elections in the country.*

**Keywords:** Political Participation; Indigeneity; Crisis; general elections

### **Introduction**

Since the introduction of electoral politics in Nigeria by the Hugh Clifford's constitution of 1922, women have not made much impact on the Nigerian political scene. According to Nda (2003:33), women's participation in decision making at all levels has been very low, warranting the conclusion that women are at the periphery of Nigerian politics, despite that they have been constituting a larger proportion of active votes. Even the population of Nigerian women has always almost been at par with that of the men in the entire census so far conducted in the country; yet, the percentage of women in elective positions, when compared with men, is very abysmal. Since independence in 1960, the presence of women in electoral politics started showing in the second Republic. In the Republic before it, no woman was able to win election into the federal legislature, though three women were elected into the Eastern House of Assembly in the 1961 regional elections. In the second Republic, the high point of female achievement was the election of the only female senator, Franca Afegbua, into the Senate in 1983 (Oleru, 1999:47). Unfortunately, she served for only three months before that Republic collapsed. In 1992, during the transition programme of Ibrahim Babangida, out of the 300 gubernatorial aspirants, only 8 were women, representing a paltry 2.6%. Even then, none of them

was able to make it to any of the government houses. Also, of the party executive positions of the parties that operated in that era, women held only 4%. In fact, in studies conducted by Ako-Nai (2005:491); Mohammed (2006:51); and Okoosi-Simbine (2006:153), the inability of women to occupy party executive positions has been seen as a major cause of women marginalization in politics, especially during party nominations. Bruce (2005:506) noted that even during the 2003 elections, the experiences of women at party primaries were not by any standard better than what it had been in previous elections, that evidence abounds as to deliberate maneuvering and proclivity for preference to male aspirants over their female counterparts by party loyalists and stalwarts. By 1999, at the dawn of the fourth Republic, the story was still the same.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is based on the liberal feminist framework. The framework itself advocates that the female gender, like their male counterparts, should be entitled to full human rights, and therefore, should be free to choose their role in life and explore their full potential in equal competition with men. In other words, there should not be any man-made obstacle or barrier preventing women from engaging in any legitimate enterprise they deem necessary. The theory goes further to postulate that there should not be any undue favouritism for any sex on the basis of gender: men and women should enjoy the same rights and have equal opportunities. According to Ako-Nai (2005:489), Feminism is characterized with looking at the man-woman relationship, in which women are usually at a disadvantage in relation to societal cultural norms, religion, and political beliefs. The inequality created is the bedrock of the feminist ideology which attempts to liberate women from the institutions that have kept them down. In line with this theory, and in consonance with the ideals of the feminist movement which has been thrown up to champion the cause of the female gender, this study advocates active women participation in electoral politics at the gladiatorial level, and the removal of all obstacles that stand on the way of women towards achieving parity with men in politics.

### **Review of Related Literature**

The concept of political participation is one of those concepts in the Social Sciences that have been subjected to several interpretations and meanings by scholars and practioners (Chukwemeka and Eze, 2011). Norman and Verba (1975), have defined political participation as consisting those legal activities by private citizens, which are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and the activity they undertake. This definition emphasizes conventional political participation and excluded unconventional politics such as illegal political protest, political thuggery, politically motivated terrorist attacks, hijack of ballot boxes etc. Political participation has also been conceived as activities of citizens designed to influence government decision making. This definition, in a wide sense, comprises all the activities of individual and groups, conventional or unconventional that target decision making process with a view to impacting a change. Axford, et. al. (2002), have observed that the definition of political participation is far from being straightforward and that one problem of the

various definitions is that they are more or less exclusive. They argue that the perception of political participation as a voluntary action through which people seek to influence the making of public policy, excludes those form of participation that is coerced. Thus, they defined political participation as a term that denotes the action by which individuals take part in the political process. Parry, Moyser and Day (1992), suggested that political participation consists of taking part in the process of formulation, passage and implementation of public policies. This conception, however, did not take into account the passive form of politics such as discussing political issues with colleagues or making joke about a politician and his political activities. Wan Asna, et. al. (2011), associated political participation with some demographic factors and argues that voting in general election is the most common type of political participation. Nancy (2004); and Brewer (2003), considered citizens participation in decision that affect them as being imperative for democratic consolidation in any society. Schlozman and Brady (1995), conceptualized political participation as activity that has the intent or effect of influencing public action, either directly or indirectly by influencing the selection of political decision makers. Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), Goetz (2003) and Chukwuemeka and Eze (2011), have identified political activities to include: voting; campaigning for a party or supporting party work through other means; protest activities; getting involved in organizations that take a stand in politics, and serving in a voluntary capacity on local governing board. In the same vein, Igwe (2002:335), defines political participation as the degree and forms of involvement of the people in governance and related institutions of society, such as the economy and culture. In its active sense, it involves participation in political campaigns and debates, attending caucus or strategy meetings of political parties, voting during elections, standing as candidates for elections, and holding of government and party posts. Okolie's (2004:53) definition goes beyond this to include freedom of expression, association, right to free flow of communication, influence decision process, and right to social justice. According to him, it also expresses such rights to demand for better social and health services, better working conditions, and increase in wages, amongst others. However, we shall use it here in a very restricted sense to mean involvement in electoral politics only, that is, standing as candidates for elections. Perhaps, the greatest manifestation of women marginalization is in politics. Despite constitutional declaration of the equal status of both sexes in most countries of the world, gender discrimination remains fully entrenched in the power configuration of the society, with consequences of limiting women's participation in the political process. In Section 42 of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria, for instance, it is expressly stated that Nigerian citizens have the right to freedom from discrimination on the basis of, among other things, sex. In as much as there is no legal document or government policy that runs contrary to this constitutional provision or puts official stamp on the marginalization of women in politics in the present-day Nigeria, the fact remains that it is fully entrenched in the system, even if unofficially. Otherwise, there would not have been talks on the part of government to redress the imbalance. The point being made here is that it is in recognition of this imbalance that all countries were mandated to allot at least 30% of their elective and appointive positions to women. It is in recognition of this marginalization that Nigeria formulated the National Policy on

Women and other such polices. It is also in recognition of this fact that almost all the political parties in Nigeria, during the election into the fourth republic, gave women aspirants nomination forms free of charge. Despite the constitutional provisions, local and international declarations of gender equality, and the attempts by government and the political structures to solve the problem of gender imbalance in politics, series of injustices are still always meted out to the womenfolk (sadly by the people, agencies, and structures that claim to have interest in redressing it). These injustices are perfected by the government and the political structures mostly occupied by men. Indigeneity is simply a discriminatory concept employed in the Nigerian state to distinguish between the indigenes or natives of a state or locality and those who are referred to as non-indigenes or settlers. For example, an Ebonyi man living in Ekiti State for over 25 years making necessary contributions to the development of the state is not regarded as an indigene of the state. Irrespective of the number of years he has spent in Ekiti State, he and all members of his family are still regarded as settlers and non indigenes hence, they cannot have access to or benefit from what is purely reserved for the indigenes, even if such indigenes have not been in Ekiti State for over 30 years. Indigeneity, according to Abdullahi Adamu is a biological term that has assumed serious social and political meaning in Nigeria and around the world. Indigeneity is used in Nigeria to distinguish natives of a particular place from other Nigerian citizens found in that locality. It is also used to confer special privileges which are beyond the reach of non-natives on the natives. What is worse, Nigerians do not have any right to indigeneity outside the state of their parents birthplace. Owing to this phenomenon, many Nigerians who are linguistically and culturally assimilated into a community different from their parents own are denied indigeneity of the place, irrespective of the number of years of living in the place. Despite the constitutional provisions on citizenship rights, Nigerians are being discriminated against in areas other than their places of origin. This no doubt is a mockery of the constitution which itself does not provide enough safeguards against such discrimination but instead tends to promote it. The application of citizens' rights often generates political tension and violence due to the fact that it is intricately tied to the issue of ethnic identity and indigeneity. It is necessary to examine the issue of indigeneity in the Nigerian state especially as it affects the women folk in political participation. It is all these issues that we intend to examine in the subsequent sections of this paper.

### **Retrospect on Women Political Participation in Nigeria's 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 General Elections**

Women have contested for different positions in the four elections held by the country since its return to democratic rule in 1999 but have recorded poor results, minimal gains and slow progress. For instance in 2002, women made up only three percent of elected officials, in 2007 they made up seven percent and in 2011 they made up about five percent and even before the 2015 general elections few women emerged as candidates after the political party primaries. In the 29 states where gubernatorial elections held this year, the representation of women seeking the office of governor and deputy governor was 87 out of the 380 candidates (22.9 per cent) running for the positions. In the contest for senatorial seats, 122 women out of 747 candidates,

representing 16 per cent, were cleared by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to run in the March 28 election. The number was not better in the contest for the lower chamber of parliament. Two hundred and sixty seven (267) women out of a total 1774 candidates ran for seats at the House of Representatives, representing 15 per cent (Gabriel, 2015:4). In fact, according to the Deputy Director Gender Division of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Mrs. Blessing Obidiegwu, 14 females were elected into the House of Representatives and eight women won as senators in the just concluded National Assembly election. What this means is that there are only 14 females out of 360 lawmakers for this current House of Representatives. The outgoing seventh assembly had 27 women and only eight of them were re-elected for the 8th assembly. Similarly, the 8th Senate has eight women out of 109 senators. Again, out of the 14 candidates that contested for the seat of the president, the only woman amongst the contenders came out in the 12th position (Akor, 2015:8). Just as men have always dominated the National Assembly since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999, the 2015 election result does not present a different picture in the number of women representation in the next four years. The gubernatorial elections have so far produced four women deputy governors. Equally, the only viable female gubernatorial candidate, Senator Aisha Jummai Al-Hassan lost the election in Taraba state after a spirited fight which raised and dashed the hope of women that at least history will be made with the election of the first female executive governor of a state. Her counterpart in Akwa Ibom State, Senator Helen Esuene of the Labour Party did not fare better as she made no meaningful impact in the all male dominated election (Gabriel, 2015:4). The number of women elected to public offices in Nigeria did not increase significantly after this year's election (Sogbesan, 2015), Eme et al, 2014). These scholars' analysis show that in the 29 states where gubernatorial elections were held, the representation of women seeking the office of governor and deputy governor stood at 87 out of the 380 candidates (22.9 per cent) that ran for the positions. In the contest for Senatorial seats, 122 women out of 747 candidates, representing 16 per cent, were cleared by the Independent National Electoral Commission to run in the March 28 election. The number was not better in the contest for the lower chamber of parliament. Two hundred and sixty seven women out of a total 1774 candidate ran for seats at the House of Representatives, representing 15 per cent (Sogbesan, 2015:2). While the Peoples Democratic Party had 19 women for the House of Representatives and seven for Senate, the All Progressives Congress had 26 women for the House of Representatives and seven for the Senate. In all of these, Enugu State had 34 women contesting for seats in the National Assembly, the highest of all the states. Edo, Katsina, Taraba and Kano states, on the other hand had the lowest numbers with one woman from each state. Ms. Osori summarises the concern of many gender advocates thus: At the end of the day – if we have only an average of 15 per cent (National Assembly) contesting, then we are sure to fall below 35 per cent. Nigerian women have not had it smooth in terms of representation in top public offices. At present, in the Senate, none of the principal officers is a woman, and only eight of the 109 Senators are women (Sogbesan, 2015:2). The recently dissolved House of Representatives had only one female principal officer. However, only 24 (7 per cent) of the 362 members are women. In Nigeria's 36 states, there is no

female governor, and the country does not appear ready to have a woman as president, although a woman contested for that office this year (Sogbesan, 2015:2). Female legislators did not have it easy in the 2015 elections. Out of the 14 candidates that contested for the seat of the president, the only woman amongst the contenders came out in the 12<sup>th</sup> position. Just as men have always dominated the National Assembly, the 2015 election result does not present a different picture in the number of women who will represent their constituencies in the next four years. So far, eight women made it to the 109-member senate as opposed to seven elected in 2011. The gubernatorial elections have so far produced four women deputy governors.

### **Analysis of Women Performance in the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria**

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) cleared no fewer than 380 candidates to contest the April 11 governorship poll in 29 states of the federation. The detailed statistics displaying the comprehensive lists with the age, party and academic qualifications of the candidates on the INEC's official web site, further revealed that states like Imo, Kano, Sokoto and Zamfara had the highest number of governorship candidates, adding that while Imo and Kano had 22 candidates, Sokoto had 21 and Zamfara had 20. According to the list, states like Enugu had 19 governorship candidates, Delta and Rivers with 18 candidates trailed the top list of states with the highest number of governorship candidates. Jigawa, Yobe, Cross River, Benue, Katsina, Nasarawa and Ebonyi states top list of states with single digit of candidates; the list also showed that Jigawa had four candidates, Yobe and Cross River had five governorship candidates, while others like Plateau had six candidates, Benue and Nasarawa had eight candidates respectively. Ebonyi tops list of states with lowest number with nine candidates. Further breakdown of the cleared candidates showed that while 25 female candidates were given the nod to battle their male-dominated counterparts, no fewer than 60 females were picked as deputy governors in all the states. Although some states especially the southern part of the country proved to be female friendly, however, some northern states like Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Plateau, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara paraded majorly male governorship and deputy candidates with Zamfara proving to be the worst gender sensitive state with only one female deputy out of the 20 aspirants. There was obvious display of gross violation of the 35 per cent affirmative action as only one of the major political parties conceded the governorship slot to a female candidate. The breakdown further showed that the political parties in Enugu State proved the most gender sensitive as they paraded the highest number of female candidates. The state had three governorship and six female deputy governorship candidates though none of the major parties were courageous enough to field a female governorship candidate. Other states trailing Enugu in giving female politicians sense of belonging include Delta, Ebonyi, Niger and Kwara with two female governorship candidates, just as the political parties in Kano, Taraba, Lagos, Sokoto and Rivers states fielded only one female candidate each with the All Progressives Congress (APC) surprisingly picking a female governorship candidate, Senator Aisha Jumai Alhassan, in Taraba State. The Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) had earlier released the list of candidates for the Presidential and National Assembly elections holding on March 28, 2015. The list of Presidential election candidates had 13 men and 1 woman vying for the number

Presidential spot supported by 10 men and 4 women as vice-president. Dr. Comfort Oluremi Sonaiya of the KOWA Party is the only female aspirant to Nigeria's number one spot. The female Vice-Presidential aspirants are Anthony Faith Ologbosere of APA, Hassana Hassan of the CPP and Arabamhen Mary of the PPN. The National Assembly comprises the Federal House of Representatives and the Senate Elections. There were 1319 candidates who contested for 360 House of Representative slots. The list comprises 267 women and 10526 men. In the Senate, there were 743 candidates who contested for 109 senatorial slots. The list comprised of 122 women and 621 men. In the just-concluded 2015 general elections, only 14 women emerged members of the House of Representatives-elect according to data provided in INEC website. The exact numbers of female senators are seven.

### **Obstacles to Active Women Participation in the Electoral Process**

A number of obstacles are on the path of women who intend to play active party politics in Nigeria. Some of these obstacles are simply as a result of their natural status as women – the belief that nature has consigned them to a specific role in the society. The other obstacles are man-made – a strategic ploy by their male counterparts to ease them out of the way. Some of these obstacles are:

- **The Zoning Formula:** The zoning formula was introduced into Nigerian politics to allay the fears of minorities. It is believed that if politics should be the 'survival of the fittest' or based on the injunction, 'might is right', the minorities who are not only disadvantaged in numerical strength but may also be educationally backward may never occupy certain elective positions. Therefore, in order to ensure that the advantaged groups do not always use their might to dominate the political scene at all times, zoning is being used at all levels to make elective positions 'go round'. Even though it has no legal or constitutional backing, it has almost become a norm since after the 1994/95 Constitutional Conference where it generated a heated debate. While zoning is being used to ensure that no area is continuously being excluded or marginalized from a particular political office, it has equally been argued that it is undemocratic as all qualified persons are not allowed to contest. It also encourages mediocrity as the best might have been zoned out. But this is not our concern here. The issue is that it is equally being used to scheme out unwanted aspirants. How this affects women particularly is that at the lower levels (especially state and local government levels), where women's impact is much felt than at the national level, strong women aspirants are normally 'zoned out' by the political parties. When it is obvious that the woman contender will sweep the polls if the primary election is conducted, it becomes easier to ease her out of the way by simply claiming that it is not yet the time of her area to produce the holder of such positions. This, therefore, clears the way for the favoured aspirant who is normally a pliable man.
- **The Indigeneity Ploy:** This is another hurdle women who are interested in elective positions have to cross, especially those of them that are married outside the constituency they would have contested if they were men or if they did not marry at all. In this case,

women who intend to contest election in the constituencies they are married to (rather than the constituency of their birth) are normally regarded by the people of such constituencies as non-indigenes (at least by birth). They are normally seen not to be qualified to contest because they are married from another land other than where they intend to contest. The situation is even worse when the woman is married from an entirely different ethnic group. Such a woman is regarded as being too ambitious and everything is done to stop her. “How can she come here and hijack our area” is normally the sentiments aroused in people to run such candidates down. On the other hand, it is equally extremely difficult to go back to her constituency of birth to contest because it is assumed that she has ‘lost’ her indigeneship by marrying outside such constituency. However, such women politicians as Daisy Danjuma, who were able to cross this hurdle, did so not because of their capabilities but because some unseen hands were involved. Others like Mrs. Mariam Ali and Josephine Aneni were not that lucky. Nevertheless, this indigeneity problem does not affect women whose constituencies where they intend to contest cover both where they are married to as well as their birth places. Violence, Thuggery and Intimidation: Though these are equally used against male aspirants by their fellow men, they have greater effects on women aspirants. Naturally and in most cases, women are more soft-minded than men and may not introduce violence and thuggery in their politicking. Conversely, men deploy all arsenals within their reach to ensure success at the polls. Women who are not strong enough to absorb the devastating effects of thuggery and political violence against them have no other alternative than to withdraw from the contest; hence, the relatively general apathy of the womenfolk. Related to the above, it is generally difficult for women to swim in the murky waters of Nigerian politics. They (especially those of them that are married) cannot attend midnight caucus meetings of the political parties where most often, major decisions are taken and offices that are supposed to be thrown open for contest are shared. The matter is made worse if the husband is apolitical or the immediate family is not supportive.

- **Culture:** The obstacle of culture is complicated by the fact that it is men who have the exclusive right of interpreting culture – what it means, on what conditions and to whom it applies – and they will always do this to their own advantage. Some cultures still do not believe that women can be leaders while men are followers. Because of this, women who venture into politics are seen as cultural deviants. In other words, patriarchy is entrenched in the society and women are expected to subordinate themselves to men. In some societies, this problem also has religious connotation. For instance, in the predominantly Muslim North, where the Purdah system was in vogue, women were expected to stay at home and cover their faces so that they could not be seen by other men. Until 1976, these women were not even allowed to vote for candidates of their choice, let alone standing for elections themselves.



## **CONCLUSION**

From the foregoing, we have been able to highlight and discuss the different forms of discrimination against women, especially in the traditional society. We found out that the greatest marginalization of women is manifested in politics where several strategies are used by men to alienate them. The paper also enumerated some of the hurdles which undermine effective women participation in the political process. Finally, we traced the origin of women struggle to achieve parity with men in the realm of politics as well as several efforts made to achieve this, especially at the international level. In conclusion therefore, we have to reiterate that the number of women in electoral politics seemed to have decreased sharply and women are still grossly underrepresented. We, therefore, state that gender should not be a factor in Nigerian politics. It has to be based on one's abilities towards contributing to national development. Equal opportunities should be seen as a matter of right and not privilege. Women equally have a stake in the polity and it is as high as that of the male folk. Therefore, they should not be treated as second class citizens. Until gender discrimination is redressed in Nigerian politics, our democracy is still faced with a very serious challenge. The number of women elected to public offices in Nigeria may not increase significantly after this year's election, analyses by this study have shown. This is because Nigerian women have encountered a number of problems while venturing into politics. There is large scale- socio- cultural discrimination from the men folk, both in choosing, voting for candidates and in allocating political offices. More often than not, men constitute a larger percentage of the party membership and this tends to affect women when it comes to selecting or electing candidates for elections. Since men are usually the majority in the political party setup, they tend to dominate the party hierarchy and are therefore at advantage in influencing the party's internal politics. Women usually constitute a smaller percentage of political party membership because of the social, cultural and religious attitudes of different Nigerian societies which most often tend to relegate women to the background. As a result, only very few men, even among the educated, allow their wives to come out and participate in politics. In Northern Nigeria, for instance, an important factor inhibiting women's participation is the house seclusion of women. Another problem facing women is lack of adequate education. Women constitute a larger percentage of the illiterate group in Nigeria. This could be attributed to the fact that in most families, parents prefer to send their sons to school, instead of their daughters whom they feel would eventually get married and thus get incorporated into another family. Thus, a larger percentage of the girls remain uneducated and unexposed. Lack of adequate finance is a crucial hindrance to effective female participation in politics in Nigeria. A large portion of the Nigerian female population is not as financially strong as their male counterparts. Family responsibilities and childbearing also hinder women from participating effectively in partisan political activities. During a sizeable part of their adult lives, most women are involved not only in child bearing, but also in child rearing. Thus, much of the time they may have wished to devote to politics is taken up by their maternal challenges and obligations. The failure of the 35 percent affirmative action puts women representation in the minority thereby relegating issues concerning women and gender equality at the border of our national

development. As 2019 elections with each political party strategizing on ways of winning, making gender parity a reality should start through the practice of internal democracy. The achievement of gender parity at party level will automatically ease the way for women in any position they want. It should be part of the manifestoes of the various political parties. In the other hand the Women themselves need to work together like their predecessors by championing a common front and working towards achieving success in 2015 and beyond. They need to help one another, be there for each other in order to hasten their “dream of gender equality.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

For millions of Nigerian women, taking part in elective politics is not easy, not with the cultural and social inhibitions they are faced with. This study is on the recently concluded general elections in the country and how women in elective positions fared. In an effort to address the challenges identified, the paper suggests as follow:

- Women should begin to seek elective positions more; not just appointments. With each woman that rises beyond those limitations identified in the paper, many more get encouraged. Also for women to remain relevant in parties, there is need to review the 1999 Constitution, political parties constitutions in order to advocate for greater representation at the party levels, support women through actively identifying, training and building capacity to lead, contest, and advocate for women and social issues, and also create affirmative action like quotas to enable them contest.
- The paper also calls for support for the legalisation of independent candidacy in Nigeria. Independent candidacy frees women (and men) from the tyranny of major political party's .
- women should make efforts to defeat the psychology of patriarchy via education, empowerment programmes, mobilization and networking.

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