

The Nigeria's Political Culture and the Quest for Gender Mainstreaming: Exploring the Scenario of the 2023 General Elections

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Abstract

Political culture reflects people's behavioural act towards political phenomenon, particularly in a democratic atmosphere. However, African political culture is largely influenced by primordial sentiments as majority of the electorates voting pattern devoid issues based. The effect of such political culture reflects in patriarchy system that recognises male dominance. This makes it imperative in this study to examine Nigeria's political culture vis a vis gender mainstreaming with much emphasis on the 2023 general election. With the adoption of cultural theory, the study explains how shared values shape political behaviour. It is a qualitative research that utilises secondary data in explaining the subject matter. The paper reveals that since Nigeria's return to democratic dispensation in 1999, women voting strength increases but their numbers in key elective offices reduce. Such findings expose how achieving gender mainstreaming within the Nigeria's political space is becoming more of a mirage. The study recommends introduction of act of parliament that would accommodate reasonable number for women political representation across the country. With this, their quota would not be robbed as it becomes legal matter and enhances an avenue to improve women partisanship in Nigeria's democratisation.

Keywords: Political. Culture, Gender, Mainstreaming, Nigeria

Introduction

The phenomenon of gender mainstreaming remains a global concern that poses threat to achieving balanced societies. However, African political dynamics seems to be more favourable for men dominance which could be attributed to several factors. But most importantly, the centrality of cultural belief remains the major root enhancing patriarchal political atmosphere (Sakariyau & Ummu, 2017). Since Nigeria's return to the fourth republic in 1999, records have shown that no woman has neither been elected as President nor as Governor at state level, yet seven consecutive general elections have been conducted.

By implications, the political space for both presidency and gubernatorial seat has been practically exclusively reserved for men.

Although pre-election circles in Nigeria have always been promising for women as several promises were made by various political parties claiming to be conscious of the female representation. In fact, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), that had ruled Nigeria for sixteen years within the present fourth republic subsidized nomination forms for women ahead of 2023 general elections (Daily Trust, November 13, 2023), yet very insignificant numbers made it to the parliaments at national and component regions. The snag remains that despite the voting strength of women during the 2023 general elections, statistics reveal that men still maintain substantial dominance across the state legislative chambers. In fact, male legislators in all the 36 states stand at 95 percent. Though Ekiti state in the South West geopolitical zone recorded highest number of women representation at the state legislative body, totalling 23 percent which outnumbered the entire regions in the North. The North West for instance had the lowest percentage of women representation with 0.46 while the South -South accounted for 10 percent of women legislators. From the national outlook, women representation at the state parliaments aftermath of 2023 general election stand at 6 percent (Daily Trust, May 25, 2023).

The antithetical paradigm in Nigeria's electoral parlance could be ascertained in the large turnout of women voters, yet female contestants remain political vulnerability to men dominance. This claim is supported by the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI, 2023) that it has become global notion that men are better political office holders than women. Such largely reflects in female electorates casting majority of their votes to men aspirants. Although Udoji and Sakariyau (2022), view this trend to be common to African politics, it questions the proportionality of equal population of both male and female within the Nigerian context.

Put differently, the practice of male dominance in the Nigeria's scenario weakens the country's resolution of 35 percent affirmative milestone. Nigeria was signatory to the CEDAW convention of 1995 which was held at Beijing, but finds it difficult to implement and domesticate the affirmative policy. This simply questions the application of international convention while exploring the dynamics of global politics. Nevertheless, gender mainstreaming becomes questionable within the political context of Nigeria. Despite the efforts many of civil society organizations advocating for equal political representation, the

practical politicking derails from gender balancing at both elective positions and appointments.

Given this, it becomes more imperative in this study to critically explore the syndrome of gender mainstreaming and Nigeria's political culture. Considering the diverse political events in Nigeria particularly the electoral outputs, it signals how cultural values have taken centre stage in electorates voting pattern. This revolves around political culture as greater influencing variable and determinant of electorates' behaviour. Be that as it may, this paper largely focuses on the synergy between political culture and Nigeria's quest for gender mainstreaming using the case of 2023 general elections. In order to achieve this, the study is divided into six sections. After this introductory segment, the second section reviews relevant literature on the subject matter. The third segment gives theoretical support using cultural theory to explain the Nigeria's political scenario. The main context of the paper reflects in the fourth section as the synergy between political culture and gender mainstreaming is adequately examined within the focus on 2023 general elections. The fifth section gives a clue to government responses and challenges of achieving the equilibrium. The concluding remark features in the sixth section and relevant recommendations are stated.

Conceptualizing Political Culture

Basically, political culture refers to people's orientation and behaviour towards political phenomenon. It symbolises peoples way of life regarding political matters. The concept is simply put by Nebeife, Izang and Okoli (2021) as the totality of orientations, values and traditions exercised by the citizens in related to political issues and objects within the polity. This view is similar to the perception of Almond and Verba (1965) that conceptualise political culture as pattern and individual's attitudes and orientations tailored along his political world. Such narration justifies citizens' actions and reactions towards political happenings (Okeke, 2015). By implication, political culture plays significant influence on people's political behaviour. It is a reflection and major determinant of political behaviour.

Not only that, in as much as human being is dynamic in nature, political culture indicates the diverse attitudes of people on political issues. This conforms to the perspective of Weils (1994) that narrates the concept as presupposes set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments governing peoples' political actions and reactions in political system. Given this, one can state that political culture has connection with ideological drives of people in relations to

political matters. It entails peoples view and perspective resulting to their political behaviours. To be precise, political culture includes rules and regulations derived from people's beliefs and values towards political phenomenon (Silver & Dowley, 2000).

However, despite the diversity of opinions and perspectives in explaining political culture, its centrality revolves around people behavioural tendency and attitudinal reactions to issues of politics. This necessitates the need to briefly expatiate typology of political culture as identified by the major theorists and proponents of the concept. According to Almond and Verba (1965), political culture is classified into three namely; parochial, subjective and participant. Parochial political culture is a situation where peoples are not informed on political circumstances and issues about their polity. It is an indication of lack of information and citizens play politics along dogmatic understanding without being properly guided. Within the Nigerian context, such is common with people in the remote villages whom are hardly updated on political matters. Their voting pattern remains parochial as stakeholders capitalised on such weakness of lack and insufficient information to influence their political decisions. Secondly, subjective political matter is an indication of circumstance where though people are informed, they are largely guided by sentiment and bias while reacting to political matters. This is common in Africa and Nigeria's context reveals how political behaviour has always been easily manipulated along ethno-religious and other sentimental affiliations. Lastly, participant political culture is a situation where people's political actions are guided with ideology and information beyond sentiment. It is participant because individuals act according to their conscience and conviction of political phenomenon without being tele-guarded.

In the final exploration of the concept, Chukwudi (2017) states that one cannot disassociate the people culture from their political mind-sets as certain values and norms have become part of the polity. Invariably, such argument proves that various societies are likely to be guided by their cultural values and norms while taking political decisions. To substantiate this, one could argue that the syndrome of sit-tight syndrome in Africa, has some cultural heritage and traditional beliefs which negate the principle of limited tenure practices as obtained in the liberal democracy. The Arab world shares similar values as their political culture believe more on monarchical arrangement.

The Concept of Gender Mainstreaming

The formalisation of the term gender mainstreaming in 1995 has made it to be one of the yardsticks used by the United Nations in accessing countries' development. This is justifiable due to the inequality cutting across diverse roles and rewards in the society. With this, gender mainstreaming has become a universal policy used in determining all kinds of inequality. According to Nwajiuba (2021), unequal access of men and women in terms of societal resources naturally justifies the relevance of gender mainstreaming. As rightly observed by Adeosun and Owolabi (2021), gender is a term representing either male or female and thus the idea of mainstreaming focuses on how both could be placed on equal opportunity and balancing. Although the term gender is viewed to be a biological denotation of human being along sexes (Alamyaebe, 2005) gender mainstreaming tries to look at equilibrium in terms of opportunities for all.

However, the scope of gender mainstreaming faces restrictions as the issue of inequality is yet to be properly addressed. Nevertheless, the concept of inequality explains the socially induced variations that divide an entire population into classes (Muntane & Lynch, 2020), putting some beneath a defined poverty line (World Bank, 2011; UNDP, 2013). The snag of inequality emphasising socio-economic and political stratification in the society remains a stumbling block to the projection of gender mainstreaming. This makes the argument of Kleven and Landais (2017) on socio-economic barriers as variables of inequality leading to class differences.

Basically, the idea of gender inequality remains a conception of disparity between male and female. Although, such is believed to have originated from patriarchal system where social formation placed advantage on male over female counterparts in diverse sectors such as education, labour market and politics (Makama, 2013), eradicating the trend necessitates the phenomenon of gender mainstreaming. Also, the patriarchal conceptualisation gives a family lineage that men serve as symbol of the family which results to women bearing husband names after marriage. To some analysts, such gesture is more of western ideology. Nevertheless, patriarchal syndrome places men on superior ladder over women by way of ensuring dominant of men in largely many positions in the public sphere (Okpe, 2005)

In another perspective, typical African setting is tailored along ideological drive that women are dependants checkmating their rights as unequal to men. Nevertheless, the Nigeria's

strides for development requires verse contributions from both gender and thus achieving substantial economic growth invariably demands closure of gender gaps (Adegbite & Machette, 2020). After all, sustainable development goals emphasise equality for all. Be that as it may, gender mainstreaming remains a unifying spot to ensure gender sensitivity, equal access and utilization of services, equal involvement in decision making and equitable treatment (Sakariyau, 2025)

Theoretical Postulation: Exploration of the Cultural Theory

The framework of cultural theory is anchored on the synergy between culture and society. It explains how cultural values, beliefs and norms influence people's behaviour, attitude and social structures. The theory was proposed by Mary Douglas, Aaron Widavsky and others. The intent was to seek how cultures explain and influence human behaviour (Swedlow, 2014). The theory encompasses various areas and aspects of cultures, norms, traditions and values in explaining some variables in the field of Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural studies. With this, diverse areas related to cultural transmission, cultural relativism and cultural dynamism are key dimension of conceptualising culture.

Cultural theory is significant for our understanding and comprehension of how individuals and people at large navigate using their identities to interact and react in a diverse world. That is why culture has become a tool for analysing man's expression in a social structure. It is also an instrument which can be used towards understanding and analysing power dynamics within diverse. In essence, cultural theory signals a comprehensive framework to explain the intricate coordination between culture, society and human behaviour. It's a vital theory used in analysing social phenomenon in the field pf social sciences.

However, this theory is borrowed in political studies to explain cultural influence on political behaviour. It is used to explore how cultural values and norms serve as key determinants in electorates' behaviour. It informs the networking and relationship between politics and culture which invariably is well represented as political culture. The political system can be easily understood using human cultural consciousness as yardstick determining his or her voting behaviour and political reactions within the polity. This signifies that political stakeholders also become mindful of cultural variable in taking decisions affecting certain groups of people.

The relevance of this theory is its application within the Nigerian context as series of elections and voting patterns are largely subjective. It implies that electorates voting trend during elections in Nigeria cannot be disengaged from their cultural believes and traditional norms. The politics of ethnicity and religion in the country justifies to some extent the intricacy of cultural affiliations on political behaviour. Since the inception of this current dispensation in Nigeria, the voting patterns have always showcased people's cultural affiliations. For instance, the 2023 general elections as the case of this study reflected how candidates for the position of the president divided voters sentiment in line with their ethnic based. The winner of the election gained higher momentum in his clan while other contestants also maintained strong supports across their lineages. Similarly, the gender politics also signals how Nigeria's political behaviour remains favourable to masculine approach. Large numbers of electorates voted for male candidates during the 2023 general elections as such suits the sentiment of patriarchal political system. The outcome of the 2023 general elections proved lack of readiness to achieving a representative government that is gender mainstreamed (Sakariyau, 2025).

Political Culture and the Challenges of Gender Mainstreaming in Nigeria's 2023 General Elections

The syndrome of cultural influence on any political system cannot be undermined. In fact, advanced democracies, though widely encouraged participant political culture, certain primordial sentiments determine their electoral outlook to certain extent. The sentiment of white supremacy among some voters in the United States of America justifies such claim. However, there is high level of consciousness devoid of subjective political culture in many advanced democracies. But Africa suffers certain setback which is akin on the nature and characteristics of political actors in the continent. As pinpointed earlier, political culture in the region widely embraces a political culture that opposes women activism in politics. By the term activism in this context, it implies allowing the female to be policy makers vis a vis occupying elective positions. The scenario in Nigeria is large women voters but low female political gladiators. Such trend is not new as various elections conducted from 1999 to 2023 witnessed sharp differences between turn up of female voters and women candidatures.

In a similar perspective, the Nigeria's political culture seems to encourage male dominance as the 2023 general elections recorded declining figure for women at national and sub-national levels. Theoretically, the country's constitution stipulates woman rights and political liberty.

Section 42(1) of the 1999 constitution explicitly stated that: “A citizen of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination”. This actually resolves the legality of women political liberty in the country. But the actual politicking in Nigeria still fails to reflect the contextual interpretation of the constitution.

Although, in the last decades, there has been a tremendous flow of women showcasing interest as party officials, voters and aspirants (Akpam, 2015), the political output is not commiserating the increased participation of female in politics. For instance, out of the 747 cleared candidates for Senatorial elections in 2015, only 122 women got clearance from the electoral commission. The swing of the pendulum did not favour women in the House Representative when 267 out of 1,774 candidates that were cleared were the female contestants. The scenario of the 2011 general elections was also a disparity dimension in Nigeria’s politicking. Going by the database of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), a total 7160 candidates (men and women) contested in April 2011 elections. Of this number, only 628 women participated in the 2011 general elections (Makama, 2013).

During the 2019 general elections, the record has shown a decline in the proportion of women that contested and won elective offices and as well those appointed into executive cabinets at state and national spheres (CDD, 2019). To substantiate this, prior to the 2019 electoral contest, total number of registered political parties was 91. However, large number of women aspirants failed to scale parties’ primaries. And the few that managed to secure tickets lost out in the general elections. As rightly reported by the Centre for Democracy and Development, a meagre figure of 4.17 per cent was recorded for elected women into various political offices (Ebuka, 2019).

The outcome of the 2023 elections signalled a poor outing for the female politicians as the February 25 presidential and National Assembly elections further demystified women chances in the country’s politicking. Out of the 92 women that contested for senatorial seats together with the 286 who vied for House of Representatives slots, only 15 women (both Senate and House of Representatives). Such outing contradicts Nigeria’s ratification of treaties towards boosting women involvement in politics (Okafor & Ileyemi, 2023). Besides the federal legislators, performance of women across the State Houses of Assembly elections was not encouraging as statistics indicate less than 6 percentage of female politicians

clinched the legislative seats at the component levels nationwide. In fact, the North West and North East geo-political recorded less than 1 percent as female representations in their various legislative houses remain scanty (Daily Trust, May 25, 2023).

Put differently, the executive seats within the Nigeria elective contest has always been dominated by men as no woman has ever emerged victorious at the presidential and gubernatorial circle. Though there was a scenario of acting female Governor in Anambra State, Dame Etiaba, from November 2006 to February 2007 when the Governor, Peter Obi, was impeached by the State House of Assembly. The court later reinstated the Governor. The 2023 elections witnessed strong formidable force from a female gubernatorial candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC), Hajia Aishatu Binani who challenged the incumbent Governor of Adamawa State, Ahmadu Fintiri of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). Nevertheless, the final atmosphere still places women on subordinate political tier as none is yet to grab the number seat at both state and federal level.

Finally, the misinterpretation and conceptualisation that women role should not be at same level with men transcends to the political space. It has become a political culture of men dominating governance and this further disputes the country's mission for gender mainstreaming. After years of military regime and the return of Nigeria to democracy in 1999 expected to usher in a more fascinating and robust politics of inclusiveness, there is yet to be fair play as men dominance proves patriarchal theory more applicable in the polity. The female population remains formidable and electoral process cannot undermine women folk in politics, but the snag still retains men continuous outplay of the political scenes across Nigeria. This questions equity and fairness as envisaged by the representation school of thought. Democracy signals liberty without any form of intimidation and marginalization, the political dynamics in Nigeria fails to be a balancer as the game of politics remains dominance of men political parlance. This still proves the viability of popular notion that equate politics to masculine profession.

State and Non - State Responses Prior to the 2023 General Elections

Prior to the electoral contest of 2023, some programmes and advocacies were championed by government and non-government organizations to encourage and improve women partisanship in political space. Some of those outings were targeted at scaling the percentage of female representation in the Nigerian political atmospheres. In exploring some of the

programmes, there is need to categorise and classify them to state responses and non- state approaches. For the state, it covers efforts made by government and its agencies in the area of policy formulation and various advocacies to facilitate women consciousness and activism in politics.

Firstly, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) through various sensitizations encouraged gender balanced politics. This was echoed in line with the National Gender Policy which Nigeria's government was signatory to many international conventions on women representation in government. In addition, the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS) used its agency, being a research body under the National Assembly, to push for inclusive government.

Secondly, besides government approach towards advocating for women representation in government, the civil society groups played vital role. Several gender based advocacies actually mobilised and sensitized the populace particularly the female electorates on the need to support the agenda of increased women representation in governance. In the forefront were the Diatom Impact Group and ElectHER that played significant role campaigning for more inclusive government through voting for large numbers of female contestants. In one of the programmes organised by the ElectHER, the group co-founder, Abosede Geogre-Organ, emphasised on a mission to strengthen gender equality and promote the participation of women in the 2023 general elections. The group was supported by Diatom Impact with grants to pursue women stride in politics and also sponsored political campaigns of qualified women in various elective positions. As rightly pinpointed by George Organ of the ElectHER,

‘Investment in girls and women, especially in politics will offer enormous benefits for the society and build a productive, and healthy community. Women participation in politics will cause greater investments in education, health, good policy making and other aspects. This prompts ElectHER to be focusing on women political participation in order to bridge inequality gaps in Nigerian politics and under representation of women in elective offices’ (Premier Times, November 20, 2022).

Collaborating the effort to place women partisanship high in the 2023 general elections, the New Life Community Care Initiative (NELCCI) made moves to ensure effective participation of women in the political process. There was a giant move from NELCCI in partnership with WomenAid Collective (WACOL) and Action Aid Nigeria on voters' education and women leadership training. The groups organised

the sensitization programme in selected states across geo-political zones. Basically, as stated by Florence Ifeanyi-Aneke:

‘As the 2023 general elections gathered momentum, the women should be at the forefront of making sure that the right candidates were voted into office. To achieve this, women should obtain their PVC and also be readily available to take part in the political process as a woman is eminently qualified to hold any elective position in Nigeria. So this time around, the women should be ready to support one of their own as women access to right information was a prelude to financial freedom’(Daily Post, October 19, 2022)

The Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF) also emphasised on the need to strengthen women partisanship via several advocacies and programmes. The body categorically called for women voters to vote for their fellow women. During the organization sensitization visit on women and their participation under NWTF #Balance4her campaign in the 2023 general election, the Chief Executive Officer, Mufuliat Fijabo said:

‘Nigeria desperately needs women in government. The country and its political institutions cannot grow when half population is being left behind. The fresh approach to leadership is the one that brings women on board as best hope for improving citizens’ quality of life and combating the deep rooted corruption that has been linked to the nation’s leadership. The present Nigeria’s democracy has not been geometrically progressing as lack of inclusion of women in decision making affects the country’s economy and security issues’ (This Day, January 10, 2023)

However, despite several calls from government agencies and civil society groups to uplift women representation in politics, the outcome was disappointing. Out of the **1,553** women that contested across the federal and state levels, only **72** got elected indicating a significant drastic loss for female candidates (ElectHER, 2023). The unfortunate scenario could also be linked to lack of government political will to address the issue of affirmative gender. The scenario is that Nigeria has always been signatory to most convention towards improving women representation and participation in politics, yet the legislative arm dropped the bill to enact law in this direction (The Nation, November, 24, 2023).

In the final analysis, the syndrome of under-representation of women in Nigeria’s political landmark questions the country’s readiness to achieving gender mainstreaming. In fact, lack of legislation to boost female chances across various

elective offices hinders the struggle for improved women partisanship and representation. In essence, legislation can serve as a window to facilitate gender mainstreaming in Nigerian political system.

Conclusion

The political culture has actually showcased enhancement of patriarchal system as series of elections conducted in Nigeria reflected the notion. Nevertheless, as pinpointed in cultural theory, people's way of life can also be dynamic. This indicates that political culture is not rigid and can be changed with time. In order to achieve enabling political environment where either male or female is allowed to enjoy constitutional rights of democratic liberty, further citizens and government engagement is required. On the part of the citizens, more work should be done to enlighten electorates' mindset towards politics of ideologies rather than primordial sentiment. With this, focus would reduce on labelling a particular sex 'weaker' and equal opportunities remains the path to socio-economic and political development. Both government agencies and civil societies, along media cooperation could facilitate effective information dissemination. Information that would reach necessary required nooks and crannies as a way of sensitizing and enhancing the populace on women involvement in politics. This would not only disabuse their traditional orientation of sidelining the female but also facilitate talents discoveries across both gender. Invariably, gender mainstreaming would be activated beyond the cities.

In addition, there is need to encourage political socialisation for both gender particularly, the female counterparts. In Nigeria, campus politics had been used as avenue that gave publicity to some individuals within the political sphere. This gesture can also be extended to female students at various tertiary institutions. The bandwagon effect of female students displaying apathy during politics on campus also reflects at the national stage. More female should be encouraged to be actively involved in students' union politics across the various tertiary citadel of learnings. The school is a viable agent of political socialisation and female need to part of the political gladiators across campuses. This would propel them for bigger assignment outside campuses

The gender bill also needs to be considered. The bill which encompasses contending issues such as citizenship, indigeneship, affirmative actions and reserved seats for women (ElectHer Report, 2023) should be reintroduced at the national parliament. It should not be viewed from automatic seats or favours for the women, but as an avenue to encourage more female

representation and participation in the polity. Some African countries have reserved seats for women in parliament and executive, this has reduced continuous agitation revolving around gender inequality. Nigeria can borrow a leaf from countries such as Uganda, Malawi, South Africa and few others in this direction. If it involves increasing constituencies to pave way for women parliamentarians or giving automatic seat to at least one female at every state, the tension of gender bias would drastically reduce. In fact, Nigeria's commitment for the affirmative policy would become noticed globally.

Finally, achieving gender mainstreaming beyond rhetoric (Sakariyau, 2025) can be obtainable with the support of all relevant stakeholders or policy makers. Convention and treaties have been endorsed and signed, the pendulum requires actions to implement the agreed international pacts. With this, attaining a gender mainstreaming would become reality rather than theoretical postulation. Nigeria is blessed with persons of integrity across gender and changing of mindset and working to create chances for all would definitely annex the potentials among the people. This invariably contributes to consolidating the country's democracy.

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