

# GENDER POLITICS AND THE 2011 ELECTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper provides an analysis of the results of the 2011 elections by gender and offers an explanation for the trends noted. It observes that since the 2011 elections there has been a slight fall in the number of women in elected positions. Nigeria is still a long way from meeting the international standard of 35% representation for women. Factors accounting for the situation include structural issues of religion and culture, women's lack of access to funds, godfatherism in the political parties and the undemocratic disposition of party leaders, political and electoral violence and vote buying. Arguing that increased participation of women will improve the quality of decision-making by enriching the harvest of ideas to inform policy, it maintains that the poor participation of women in politics casts doubts on Nigeria's democratic credentials. Democracy relies on the principles of liberty, equality and full participation of all citizens in government activities. The 2011 election results show that the needs and interests of women will remain peripheral and that the presence of a critical mass of women in decision-making processes and leadership positions will be achieved only in the long run.*

## INTRODUCTION

On the surface Nigeria appears to be a very progressive nation when one looks at its elaborate gender policy and management framework as well as the high profile of certain female political actors, professionals and other prominent women entrepreneurs. Nigeria has ratified all major international legal instruments on women including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)(1985) and its Optional Protocol on Women (2004) and the AU Protocol on Women (2004). But, as Pittin (1991) demonstrates, beneath the surface the reality for most Nigerian women is stark gender disparities in formal education, political representation, income, labour force participation, access to capital and agricultural inputs and so on.

These disparities represent a kind of superstructure on top of an underlying structure of socio-cultural gender prejudice and discriminatory practices. Accordingly, the gender profile of Nigeria shows severe disparities. Female political representation currently stands at 6.85%.<sup>1</sup> The *Poverty Profile for Nigeria* (National Bureau of Statistics 2008) provides statistical evidence of the feminisation of poverty as a national phenomenon in both rural and urban areas. Gender disparity is evident in virtually all variables. More specifically, Nigeria has a Gender Equity Index<sup>2</sup> of 44 out of 100 – lower than most sub-Saharan countries, including Ghana (58) and Rwanda (84) (*Social Watch* 2009).

Greater interest in having more women represented in politics and decision-making flows from widespread civic and political mobilisation, commitment to international treaties such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR – acceded to by many African countries that are members of the UN), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); the groups of rights under the UDHR and ICCPR guaranteed by Chapter IV of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution and the group of rights under ICESCR included in Chapter II of the Constitution; the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the Convention on the Nationality of Women and the Convention on the Consent of Marriage, Minimum Age of Marriage, and the Registration of Marriage.

Recurrent in most of these is the issue of gender equality. There is also CEDAW, which brings together a number of prior conventions concerning women's human rights and is considered the most comprehensive of all the conventions on women and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, adopted in 1981 by the then Organization of African Unity (OAU) and ratified by 49 of the organisation's 52 member states.

A number of women's groups have also emerged to challenge certain unfavourable cultural practices which do not favour women. They have raised awareness of women's reproductive and other rights and contributed to the foundation of a civil and democratic society while constitutional reforms have further helped to reverse gender discrimination. In the lead-up to the 2011 elections, in particular, more recent advocacy activities for women's increased participation in politics can be traced to the National Women's Summit held in June 2010 and intended to mobilise all stakeholders to open the political space to increase the quantity and quality of women's involvement in politics and the elections.

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1 Compare this with Mozambique, whose national Parliament in 2003 comprised 250 men and 102 women, and Rwanda, whose Chamber of Deputies had increased to 48.8% women's representation by 2007. These levels were reached through the use of affirmative action.

2 The GEI uses three indicators: economic activity, education, and empowerment.

It must be recognised that in spite of some gains it is still not easy for women to make it into political office and prestigious leadership positions. Often, the issues on the political agenda of women do not feature, nor are they deemed a priority. The fact that men predominate in the public and political sphere means that public organisations and structures are heavily influenced by male values, attitudes and priorities, to which women are very often expected to conform and not to attempt to transform. They are characterised by deeply entrenched norms of male privilege and power. Whether these are actively antagonistic to women or simply organised in ways that do not favour or suit them, it is difficult for relative newcomers to pose any serious challenge and those who attempt to do so face a very quick and brutal backlash (Asimwe-Mwesige 2006, p 56). The fact that women need greater participation in the political, policy and governance arena is now globally accepted and the need to accelerate gender equality and, especially, the empowerment of women is not only a national necessity but a globally accepted ideal. This led the United Nations General Assembly in July 2010 to create UN Women,<sup>3</sup> the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, as part of the world body's reform agenda.

Using data from various sources<sup>4</sup> this article attempts to analyse the results of the 2011 elections held in Africa's largest democracy and compare them with those of previous elections in order to show the impact as well as the gains and losses; identify the possible causes of and explanations for the trends observed and seek solutions which will enable women to participate more effectively in future elections in Nigeria. With this in mind, the next section is a conceptual analysis of the key words of this article: gender, politics and elections. The third section analyses the results of the 2011 elections by gender and the fourth identifies possible factors accounting for the trends observed. The last section contains suggestions for ultimately achieving gender balance and achieving gender representation in the short term.

## POLITICS, ELECTIONS AND GENDER: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

### *Conceptualising politics and the practice of politics in Nigeria*

The word politics was first used by Aristotle to refer to the general state of affairs in the Greek city states. Aristotle asserted that humans are, by nature, political animals who have a natural affinity for living in some sort of ordered society, a

3 UN Women merges and builds on the important work of the Division for the Advancement of Women, the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (see UN WOMEN 2011).

4 Due to a lack of access or inadequacy, at times figures from data sources do not tally. However, they give a general picture of the situation.

political community, under a system of government. The term is thus often used in the operation of government, which is established to maintain order in society by regulating and directing the behaviour of its members.

The core of politics is human beings making important decisions for themselves and for others (Almond, Powell, Strom & Dalton 2000, p 3). The word refers to the activities associated with the control of public decisions among a given people and in a given territory, where the control may be enforced by authoritarian and coercive means. Politics has to do with choices (though not all choices or decisions are political). It also relates directly to public rather than private decisions. The support or consent of the governed community is often sought through the organisation of elections and voting by all members of the community, men and women alike.

However, it has been observed that the character of the Nigerian state inherently inhibits the effective participation in the political process of one gender compared to the other. Osaghae (1994) has argued that there is a link between amoral politics and state pitfalls in Africa and Englebert (2000) and Joseph (1987) make similar comments, using tags such as neopatrimonialism and prebendalism to explain the nature of politics. According to them political power is perverted as a tool used to appropriate wealth, a situation that has translated political competition into desperation and fierce do-or-die battles. Thus, elections in Nigeria and the contest for political power are still seen as zero-sum activities.

### *Elections*

As an essential procedure that allows members of an organisation or community to choose representatives who will run government, elections are crucial and should be free and fair. Mackenzie (1967) identified four conditions for the conduct of a free and fair election. These are: an independent judiciary to interpret electoral laws; an independent, competent, non-partisan electoral management body (EMB) to manage the elections; a developed system of political parties and a general acceptance by the political community of the rules of the game. Igbuzor & Edigheji (2003, p 2) have identified three key requirements for the delivery of free and fair elections in Africa: an independent judiciary, an independent, competent, non-partisan EMB and a developed system of political parties.

There is no doubt that elections play a vital role in a representative democracy. They are the primary mechanism for the implementation of the principle of popular sovereignty. Ultimate authority rests with the people and the people delegate this authority to their elected representatives through the electoral process. Unfortunately, in most of Africa elections are not usually free and fair. The problems facing the electoral process include rigging, distortion or doctoring

of results, manipulation of the electoral process and flagrant abuse of electoral laws. If well conducted, elections not only legitimate ruling authorities and articulate the will of the voters they also establish a stable majority, which leads to political stability.

While improvements can be observed, due to the high stakes elections continue to suffer from serious credibility and legitimacy problems. In most cases the problems relate to the neutrality of the EMBs, whose members are appointed by incumbent executives, and their inability to administer the process impartially. The zero-sum, winner-takes-all nature of political competition, which is engendered by the exclusionary character of state power, and the abject poverty and illiteracy in civic and formal educational terms of the vast majority of the people, men and women alike, leave ample room for electoral processes to be manipulated through pay-offs and bribes (Osaghae 2003). Nevertheless, good elections are generally considered to be those in which there is effective participation of all, women and men alike, as organisers, voters and candidates.

### *Gender*

Gender refers simply to the social and cultural definition of being female or male. It is based on, but also reinforces, what women and men are expected to do. This definition influences society's values, expectations and the opportunities and resources available to both women and men. To a large extent it also influences the expectations of boys and girls and the way they are brought up.

Unfortunately, the practice, perception and expectations of boys and girls are socially determined; they are learned behaviours. Gender roles are learned and cultural and can change, whereas sex roles are based on the biological differences and attributes of females and males and cannot change. The social disaggregation of roles between males and females is referred to as gender division of labour. Opportunities for education, employment and participation in decision-making as well as entitlement to assets are often dependent on gender, with consequent disadvantage to women and to the economy.

The right and entitlement of men and women to opportunities, resources and decision-making are affected by or based on socio-cultural norms rather than on human rights or on their respective development capabilities and are perpetuated at the individual as well as the societal level. Since it is women who are more generally excluded or disadvantaged in relation to social and economic resources and decision-making, efforts to identify and redress imbalances have focused on women's situation and women's views. This article tends, therefore, to follow this trend.

Gender equality, an integral element of fundamental human rights, can be

understood from two perspectives: equality of rights, opportunities, access and choices between men and women and the absence of discrimination on the basis of sex or gender roles. It calls for the empowerment and participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life. Gender equity is often used interchangeably with gender equality, being aimed at the same outcomes – development, fairness and social justice. What gender equity achieves is optimal equality of opportunity, capability and environmental conditions for both men and women in whatever they do as political or economic agents. Gender equity is thus the ultimate object of the various gender equality goals such as those contained in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the New Partnership for African Development Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality and so on (NPC undated, pp 9-13).

African feminism focuses on socio-cultural existence or relations between men and women. Of particular interest is the fact that feminist reformers and leaders are at pains to sensitise women to win greater equality with men, thus ending the oppression of women. In a male-dominated culture such as ours, while it may no longer still be deemed inconceivable for a woman to be in politics (Azuike 2005, p 134), probably because 'politics would unsex and degrade women, destroy harmony and lead to a decline in birth rate' (Iglitzin 1976, p 9 quoted in Azuike 2005, p 134), politics is still a choice made with caution, and often not without (family) consultation and, where applicable, spousal agreement.<sup>5</sup>

One of the fundamental obstacles to women's equality is the discrimination and inequality in the status of women and men derived from larger social, economic, political and cultural factors that have been justified on the basis of physiological differences. Although there is no physiological basis for regarding politics and the political sphere as exclusively male or for regarding the household and the family as essentially the domain of women, for the devaluation of domestic and child care and for regarding the capacities of women as inferior to those of men, the belief that such a basis exists perpetuates inequality and inhibits the structural and attitudinal changes necessary to eliminate such inequality.

By virtue of their gender, women in politics or who are interested in politics experience discrimination in terms of denial of equal access to the power structures that control society and determine development issues, including peace initiatives. In Nigeria, additional differences, such as ethnicity, religion and socio-economic status may compound this and have even more serious implications when used to justify compound discrimination (*Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies*, p 46). Fundamental resistance creates obstacles with wide-ranging implications for gender equality. It promotes the uneconomic use of women's talents and wastes

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<sup>5</sup> It is generally still considered better for women who engage in politics to be married. Single women frequently find politics more difficult to engage in than do single men.



the valuable human resources necessary for development and, ultimately, society is the loser in this under-utilisation of women.

There is also gender insensitivity or bias with regard to the election of women. In the view of Azuike (2005), 'male domination and gender bias have led to the distancing of women from elective political positions in Nigeria. Their participation continues to be marginal and very insignificant.' As a result, the needs and interests of women will remain peripheral, while society generally will not gain from contribution until there is a critical mass of them in decision-making processes and leadership positions. Gender equality in politics is thus of the utmost importance to women's well being and to their development, conscientisation and the transformation of society. There is a need to focus not only on including women but also on the relationships of power that generate women's inequality and the role of men, thereby making gender relations the prime target of investigation and transformation (Gouws 2005, p 25). This means taking into consideration women's agency – their capacity to free people to act (Giddens 2001).

### *The language of politics is masculine*

Politics, like most professions, has a language and, unfortunately, the language of politics in Nigeria is essentially masculine. To speak to a community in which politics is considered to be the exclusive preserve of men and there is little appreciation of women in public life, it would be foolhardy to present a female candidate for office without prior sensitisation. Thus, the place of women and the community's perception of them determines the extent to which they can make inroads into that community.

## ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE 2011 ELECTIONS BY GENDER

Nigeria's federal system consists of three levels of government – federal, state and local. This analysis is limited to the federal and state elections because local elections take place at different times all over the federation and it is rare for the entire country to be covered at any one time.

The number of women in state houses of assembly is 69, spread through all but 11 of the 36 states<sup>6</sup> of the federation (See Table 1).

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6 These are Bornu, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano, Kebbi, Nassarawa, Osun, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe and Zamfara states.

All but one of the states with no female representatives are in the North. The exception is Osun State.

This largely confirms the influence of tradition, culture, religion and education on gender parity in elections. In these states women were either not given the opportunity to stand or did not receive sufficient votes to win.

**Table 1**  
**Number of Women in Parliament by Political Party (2011-2015)**  
**STATE HOUSES OF ASSEMBLY (SHA)**

Party	No of female members
Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN)	15
All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA)	6
Labour Party (LP)	2
People's Democratic Party (PDP)	46
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69</b>

Source: Culled from data from the Gender and Affirmative Action Issue Based Project

An increased number of women aspirants contested party primaries for the 2011 elections.

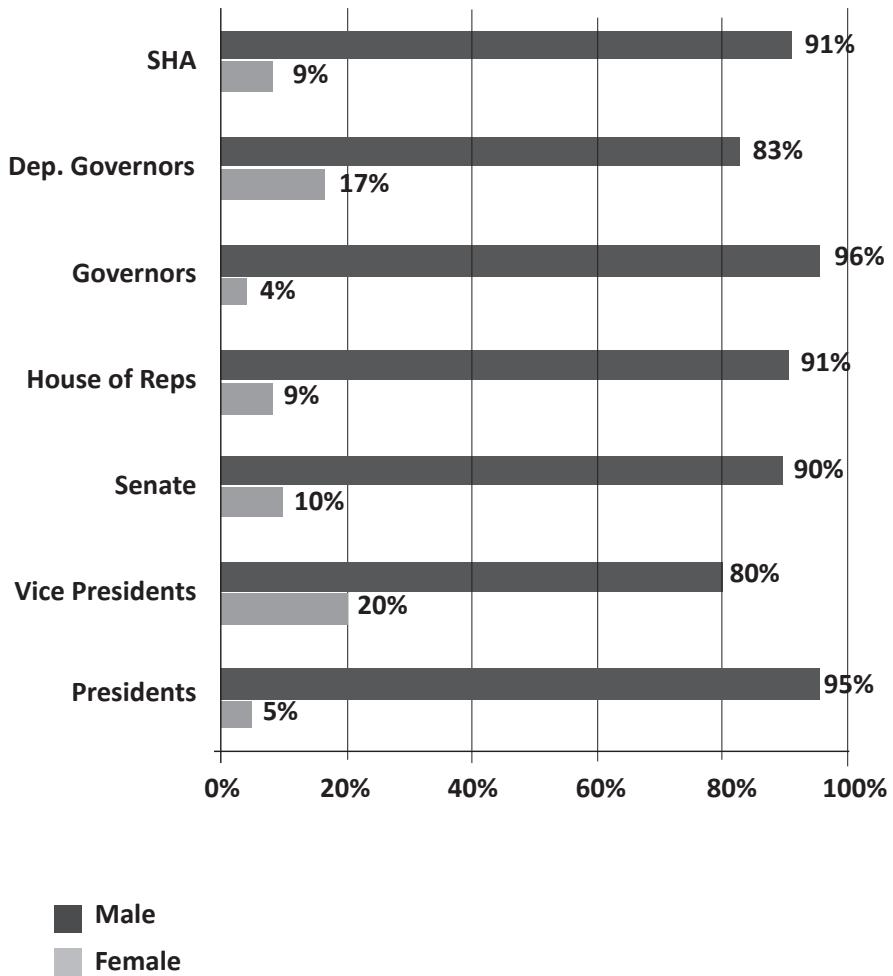
Table 2 shows the number of female candidates in five major political parties and compares the numbers with the situation in 2007. Overall, there were 211 more women candidates, a 31.3% increase. While more women stood for the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), the APGA and the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), fewer stood for the ACN and the PDP.

Though many of the women lost, a significant number compared to previous elections won party primaries and stood for elected positions in the various political parties. Women constituted 9.1% of candidates for the National Assembly. Figure 1 shows the breakdown by position.

Clearly, despite the increased number of female aspirants only a few emerged as candidates and even fewer as winners (see Table 3).



**Figure 1**  
**Gender Representation**



Source: National Gender Data Bank (NGDB) – National Centre for Women’s Development (NCWD) 2011

**Table 2**  
**Female Candidates for the Five Major Political Parties 2007 and 2011**

Party	2007	2011
ACN	83	62
ANPP	73	77
APGA	25	70
CPC	0	66
PDP	126	83
TOTAL for all parties*	674	885

\*Average growth in 2011 = 31.3% Source: National Gender Data Bank

**Table 3**  
**Number of Female Contestants/Winners in the 2011 elections**

Type of election	No of female candidates	No of female winners
State House of Assembly	414	55
House of Representatives	170	18
Senate	86	7
Deputy Governor	57	1
Governorship	13	0
Vice President	2	0
President	1	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>643</b>	<b>81</b>

Source: INEC, March 2012

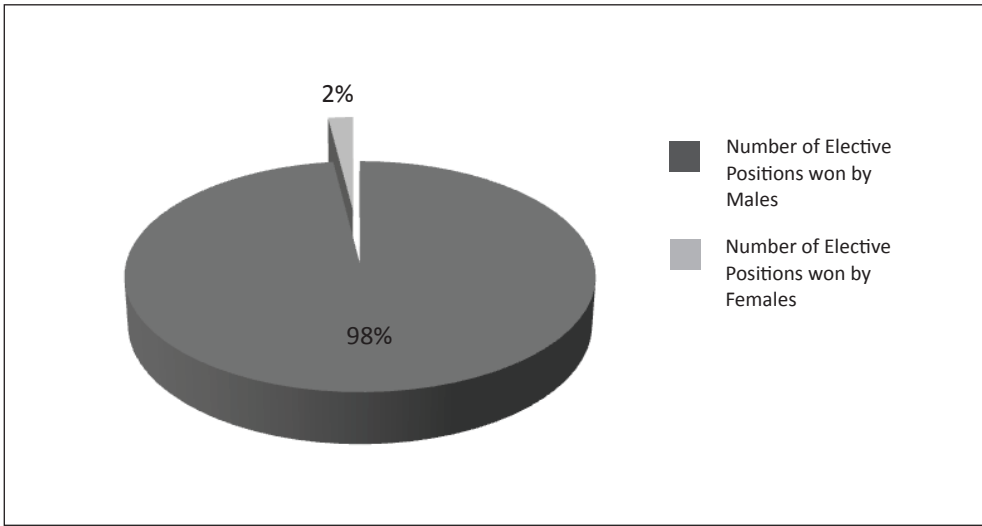
**Table 4**  
**Number of Seats Won in General Elections from 1999-2011 by Gender**

Year	Total number of seats available	Number won by men		Number won by women	
		Number	%	Number	%
1999	1533	1 504	98.23	27	1.76
2003	1533	1 464	95.62	67	4.38
2007	1533	1 435	93.73	96	6.27
2011	1533	1 452	94.8	81	5.2

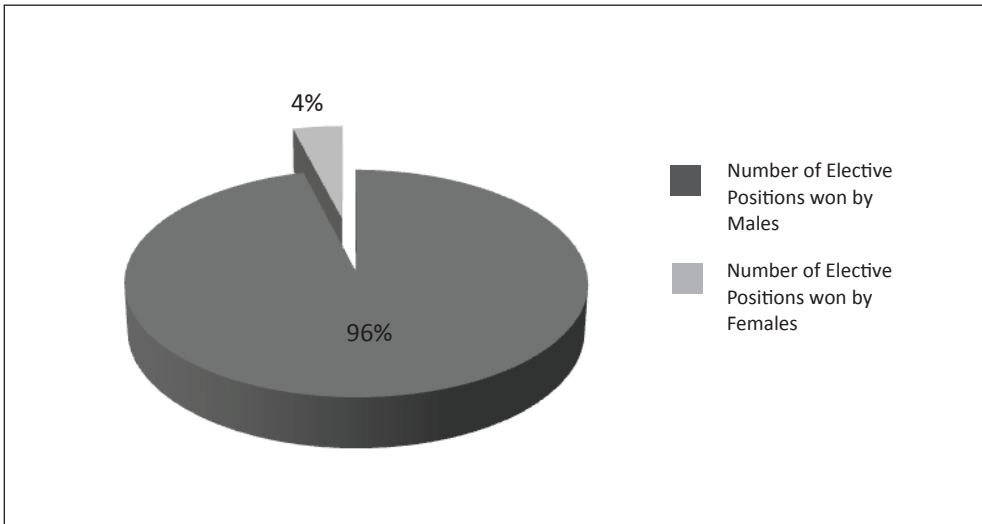
Sources: National Gender Data Bank (NGDB) – National Centre for Women’s Development (NCWD) 2011; INEC; Gender and Affirmative Action Issue Based Project [www.nassnig.org](http://www.nassnig.org)

As Table 4 and Figures 2-5 show, while there had been progress since the return to civil rule and multiparty contestation the slice of the women’s elective cake decreased by about 1% in 2011. Men won 98.2% of the 1 533 available positions in 1999, 95.6% in 2003, 93.7% in 2007 and 94.8% in 2011.

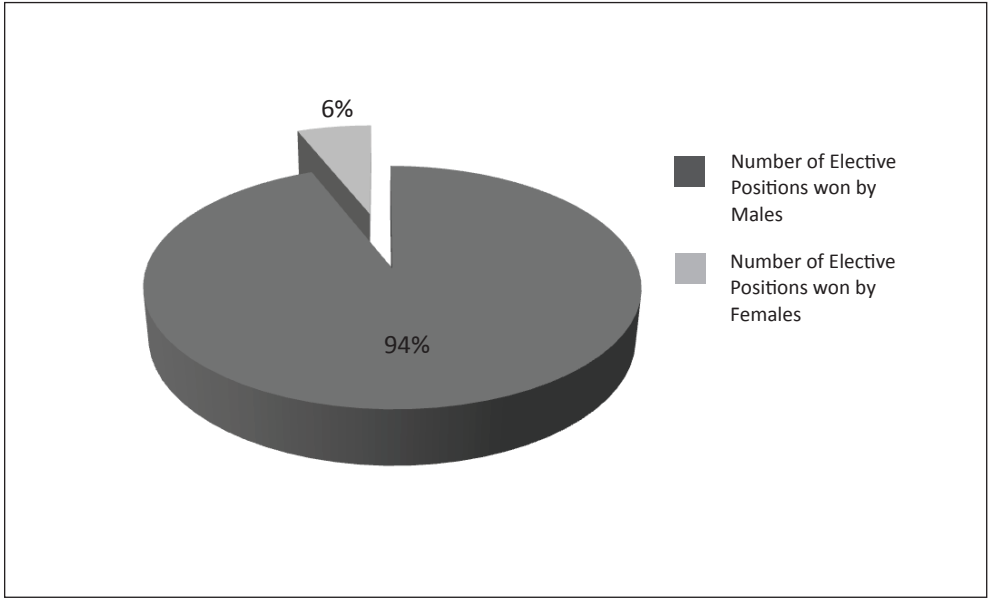
**Figure 2**  
**Number of Seats won in the 1999 General Election by Gender**



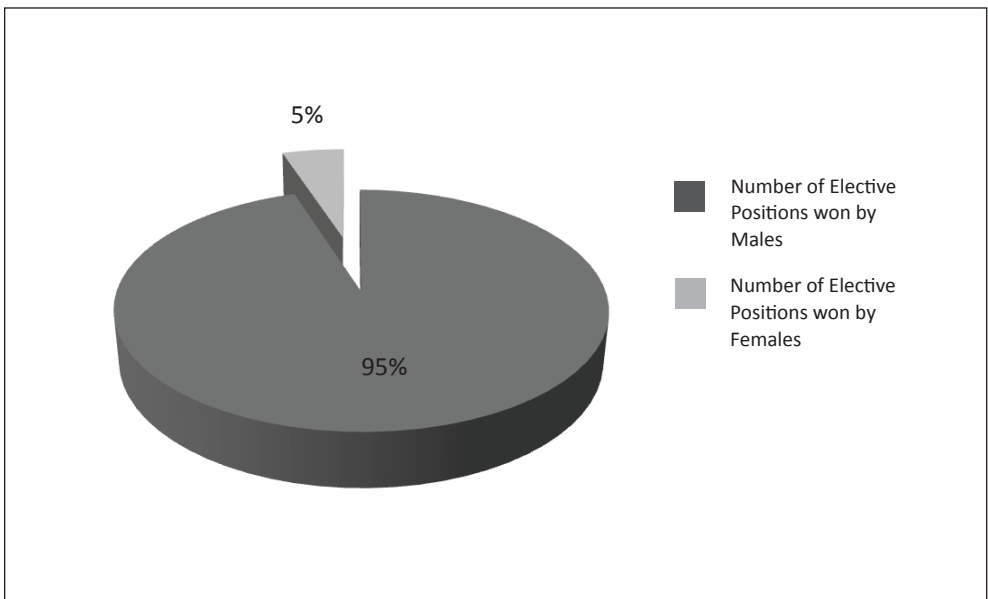
**Figure 3**  
**Number of Seats won in the 2003 General Election by Gender**



**Figure 4**  
**Number of Seats won in the 2007 General Election by Gender**



**Figure 5**  
**Number of Seats won in the 2011 General Election by Gender**



Furthermore, although the number of female candidates increased in general, none of the main political parties fielded women in the presidential, vice-presidential or gubernatorial contests. The one female presidential candidate stood for the United Party for Development (UPD) – the ruling PDP's female presidential aspirant had lost in the party primaries. Four smaller parties – the African Renaissance Party (ARP), the Better Nigeria Progressive Party (BNPP), the Fresh Democratic Party (FRESH) and the National Transformation Party (NTP)<sup>7</sup> – put up vice-presidential candidates.<sup>8</sup>

It should be noted that there was no election in 2011 in Anambra State because the governor, Peter Obi, of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), had only taken his oath of office in 2006 after the court of appeal declared him the winner of the election he had contested in 2003, hence his four-year term only ended in 2010 and he won a second term, starting in that year. In Edo, Ekiti and Osun states there were no elections in 2011 because the terms of the governors of those states had started late, having been decided by judicial rulings that quashed the elections of their predecessors. There was a similar situation in Kogi, Cross Rivers, Adamawa, Sokoto and Bayelsa states.

In those states where elections did take place, of 348 gubernatorial candidates only 13 (3.7%) were women, who stood and lost in Benue, Delta, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Kano, Kebbi, Kwara, Oyo and Plateau states. The women were fielded by 11 political parties: the African Democratic Congress (ADC), which had three candidates; the APN, with two and the APGA, Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), African Liberation Party (ALP), BNPP, FRESH, Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN), Mega Peoples Progressive Party (MPPP) and Labour Party (LP), with one each (Irabor, 2011, p6).

Some parties put up women for the position of deputy governor – 57 (17%) of candidates were women – but only one, the ACN candidate in Lagos State, won. A paltry number of women (10%) won their party primaries and stood for the National House of Assembly and the various state houses of assembly (9%). It is only by comparison with the past, not by comparison with men that one can hesitantly say that women have made fair progress over the years and some but not very encouraging progress in the 2011 elections. According to the ANPP's National Woman Leader, who was speaking about the North, there is increased political awareness among women, even though many are still unwilling to participate actively as candidates. It is instructive that Adamawa State in the North had the highest number (23)<sup>9</sup> of women candidates.

7 Senator Grace Bent in *The Vanguard*, 17 May 2008, p 16.

8 Of the 63 political parties registered for the 2011 general elections, only 13 fielded female governorship aspirants.

9 Similarly, 42 women emerged as candidates on the ANPP's platform. Of these, 11 stood for the Senate, 16 for the House of Representatives and 15 for state houses of assembly.

Unfortunately, only three of them won, while in Lagos all the ACN's female candidates were elected to the National House of Assembly and the state House of Assembly. It is possible that the reason for this is that the party has a policy of pre-selecting female candidates and imposing them on the electorate. Women occupy 17.5% (7) of the 40 seats in the Lagos State House of Assembly.

In the national Parliament, which consists of two chambers – the Senate and the House of Representatives – there was a decrease in the number of female senators from nine in 2007 to seven in 2011. The women were fielded by the PDP (4), APGA (2) and ACN (1). Similarly, in the House of Representatives there was significant drop in the number of successful candidates – from 27 (7.5%) in 2007 to 19 (5.27%) in 2011. In total, therefore, women comprise only 6.3% of Nigeria's 469-member national Parliament, a far cry from the millennium development goal of 30% by 2015.

**Table 4**  
**Number of Women in the Senate by Political Party**  
**2011-2015**

Party	Number of women
ACN	1
APGA	1
PDP	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>

Source: Culled from data from Gender and Affirmative Action Issue Based Project

**Table 5**  
**Number of Women in the House of Representatives by Political Party**  
**2011 – 2015**

Party	Number of women
ACCORD	1
ACN	4
ANPP	1
APGA	1
PDP	16
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>

Source: Culled from data from Gender and Affirmative Action Issue Based Project

Obviously, much more still needs to be done for women, who, according to the 1991 census, constitute close to 50% of the nation's total population but whose degree of participation and representation, especially in politics, is, according to Azuike (2005, p 135), miniscule. The Registration and Election Review Committee (RERC)<sup>10</sup> set up by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) after the 2011 elections noted that:

women featured in the election as polling staff, election observers, among other functions that they performed. For example, in the Presidential elections, about 40 percent of the election staff and 36 percent of the presiding officers were female, with their proportion lower for collation officers. The number of women who contested the 2011 general elections and those who were elected was insignificant, compared to the number of male candidates who contested and won.<sup>11</sup>

Women, therefore, continue to be under-represented in elected public political offices, relative to their size in the country's population. For example, only 9% of candidates in the National Assembly elections and 8.7% in the state houses of assembly elections were women and only 3.7% per cent of candidates for governor and 17% for deputy governor were women despite the fact that INEC's Gender Unit and the activities of various stakeholders targeted women's political education, political participation and voter education (INEC 2012).

Alarmingly, the committee noted that there is a clear possibility that women's performance in the 2011 general elections may be repeated in 2015. To avoid this, the RERC suggested that there is a need to revisit the recommendations of the Electoral Reform Committee and identify areas that might put gender on the agenda.

#### FACTORS ACCOUNTING FOR GENDER BIAS IN THE 2011 ELECTIONS

The factors accounting for marginalisation of women in the 2011 election are no different from those that have obtained in the past and it is important that they be kept on the table so society can continue to work on them.

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<sup>10</sup> This author was a member of the RERC.

<sup>11</sup> This confirms that although Nigerian women participate actively in politics their 'activism has not always been rewarded with commensurate share of political power' (Sani 2001, p 136) or even appointments.



### *Marginalisation*

Marginalisation within parties, one of the important factors, is the consequence of the chauvinistic politics that prevail in the country as it does in many other African countries. It is the parties who recruit candidates, seeking people who, because of their personal qualities, background and overall ability, stand a good chance of being elected. The problem at party level in Nigeria stems from the fact that women are not involved at the executive level or are not nominated or supported for strong positions in the parties (Okoosi-Simbine 2003a) – positions which would give them valuable political experience.

Unfortunately, there are few women in important institutions of electoral governance. They are not prominent in party primaries and play a minor role in party caucuses and strategic meetings. Although the majority of voters in elections are women and women have a substantial presence at campaign meetings and rallies as supporters and entertainers, they are rarely card-carrying or registered members of parties and this lack of active party membership marginalises them in both elected and appointed posts.

### *Methods of nomination*

A cursory look at two common methods of nominating candidates for positions within parties shows that the most democratic, normal and constitutional process is to organise party primaries at conventions. This involves inviting specific and equal numbers of representatives from each constituency to vote for the candidates of their choice to carry the banner of the party. It is, however, an expensive procedure, both from the point of view of the party that organises the convention and that of the candidates who must conduct their own campaigns.

### *Finances*

Money is thus a major factor in party primaries and is used both to induce officials and encourage voters to support particular candidates. Since in general male aspirants have more money than female aspirants, many women are eliminated because they simply cannot match their male opponents Naira for Naira (Ibrahim & Salihu 2004, p 10). Women will therefore find it formidably difficult to attain leadership positions in a party.

### *Influence of party elders*

A second system involves party elders simply selecting, endorsing and presenting a consensus candidate, supposedly to ease tension among contestants. They then

try to pacify losers by giving them options such as selection to other (often lower) positions, appointments, contracts or even direct finance to offset their campaign expenses up to that point. This is usually done in the name of the whole process being a 'family affair' whose 'dirty linen should not be washed in public' and that should not be allowed to 'tear the party apart'. Certainly less democratic, here too, hegemonic, gerontocratic and patriarchic party leadership, without any rules or sanctions to compel the representation of women candidates, further marginalises women (Okoosi-Simbine 2003).

### *Deliberate obstruction*

The few women who do attempt to engage the political process are faced with difficulties, especially arbitrary behaviour by party officials. They may declare candidates without an election; change the election rules or voting system suddenly without proper notice to candidates, and often dilly-dally about publishing the names of those eligible to vote in the primaries. Furthermore, officials may change the venue for the primaries, hold unscheduled meetings in unannounced venues where critical decisions are made or overturned, rig elections and cause violence and use 'zoning' and other criteria selectively to eliminate unwanted (often female) aspirants, thereby making the playing field uneven.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly it is within the parties themselves that constraints to women remain a major hurdle. Unfortunately, their involvement in party affairs determines their level of political awareness and commitment to active political participation in elections. An analysis of card-carrying members of political parties by gender will reveal a wide gap.

### *Godfathers*

Irabor (2011, p 9) believes the role of many godfathers was reduced in 2011 because 'their candidates performed woefully at the elections'.<sup>13</sup> While this may be true to an extent, it is also the case that new godfathers emerged.

An example is Kwara State, where an outgoing governor challenged his biological father, who was godfather of the state's politics. Governor Busola Saraki opposed his sister's gubernatorial aspirations and his preferred candidate won the election despite the fact that his father supported his sister. In defeating his father

12 This gives party leaders, elders and officials a tight grip on the party and requires members and aspirants to play what is referred to as the politics of *entryism*.

13 Among the notable casualties were a former Nigerian ambassador to Ireland and Federal Minister of Aviation, Kema Chikwe, the daughter of former President Obasanjo, Senator Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello and Senator Daisy Danjuma, wife of the retired chief of army staff, Theophilus Danjuma.

and successfully installing his own candidate, the former governor emerged as the new godfather. Godfathers were critical to the outcome of elections in many states, where party machinery was used to select and impose candidates. This was the case within the ACN.

In relation to the impact of godfatherism, Irabor (2011, p 12) has observed that the current political climate in Nigeria is likely to be more favourable to female aspirants and women from privileged backgrounds because they are less likely to be victims of the sexual harassment or political violence many of their counterparts have had to endure as they can take advantage of the party machinery that their relatives control or can influence.

It is my view that women favoured by this type of practice are unlikely to work for the benefit of their fellow women and of society but will, as is the practice (Okoosi-Simbine 2005), be accountable to those who appoint or support them. The result will be a class of economically dependent women who will show no interest in exercising their right to influence government's decisions (Onsarigo, 2005, p 96). For these reasons the phenomenon of godfatherism must be discouraged.

### *Violence*

Political and electoral violence has been a feature of the democratic process in Nigeria since the return to civil rule, multiparty politics and elections in 1999. In 2011 mayhem erupted in Bauchi State after the April presidential elections, resulting in the deaths of nine National Youth Service Corps members (*The Punch*, 1 May 2011, pp 40-41).<sup>14</sup> While such violence has an impact on freedom of assembly and on electoral outcomes which affects all citizens, it probably has more of an impact on the already hesitant women.

Onsarigo (2005, p 94) has found in relation to Kenya that parties and individuals who are able to use violence do better in elections. As a consequence, the electorate has been conditioned to view violence as inevitable during electioneering. Politicians, especially members of the ruling party, exploit the instruments of state to dampen participation, an attitude which discourages opposition parties and individuals, particularly women, from participating in the electoral process. This results in apathy and predictable outcomes where elections do not necessarily reflect the wishes of the electorate.

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14 Examples of other reported violent incidents include the assassination of a gubernatorial candidate for the ANPP and six others in Maiduguri by unknown gunmen on 28 January 2011 and the murder of the ANPP chairman of the Tafawa Balewa Local Government Council Area, Alhaji Isiaka Mohammed, along with his three children (*The Guardian*, 31 January 2011). *ThisDay*, 18 April 2011, reported that the presidential election of 16 April had sparked violence leading to loss of life and destruction of property worth millions of naira in Adamawa and parts of Bauchi and Taraba states.

Individually or collectively, elements such as patriarchy,<sup>15</sup> religion, vote buying, ethical and cultural issues, weak constituency networks and footholds, violence and the use of invective played important roles in the absence of gender equity in the elections of 2011. A combination of some of these factors affected the ACPN candidate in Kwara State, a predominantly Muslim Fulani state. Patriarchy in particular creates systematic gender inequalities by condoning the male supremacy and dominance over women that operate in the political process (Ndambuki 2006, p 17). The priority of such patriarchal states is to sustain and defend their power.

While the public sphere is opening up to women, the private (family and household dynamics) sphere remains intact and women are constantly reminded that their real place is at home and under their husbands.

The barriers women face in entering public and political life do not exist in a vacuum – they are closely related to their socio-economic and cultural status. For many political leaders the fact that the issue of women's underrepresentation in politics and elections is part of a wider problem becomes a convenient excuse not to address the barriers created by the structures, cultures and practices within politics itself. Therefore, strategies that merely focus on encouraging greater involvement by women in politics and on improving the capacity of those who come forward may not achieve much if they fail to address the structural and cultural resistance to women from within these powerful groups (Asiimwe-Mwesige 2006, p 57) as Nigerian women prepare for future elections.

While modernisation, globalisation and increased advocacy have resulted in an improvement in the situation many of the factors militating against women's involvement in politics remain unchanged. For instance, their lack of access to formal and functional education has reduced their involvement in the development process (Sani 2001, p 163; Okoosi 2000, pp 25-44). According to the 2010 MDG Report, although the situation is improving, the proportion of girls enrolled at all levels of education is still lower than that of boys. There has been a gradual increase in the ratio of girls to boys in primary education since 2000 and in 2008 the number of girls per 100 boys was 85.4. However, assuming the trend of the last five years continues, the level expected to be reached by 2015 will still fall short of the target. More effort is needed to introduce measures to encourage girls to attend school. The situation is even worse with secondary education where, in 2000, the ratio was 81:100 while in 2008 it was 79.9. At tertiary level, too, the ratio shows signs of decline.

There is a strong association between women's education and their participation in politics. Women's innate capacity for leadership would be

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15 The practice institutionalised in many societies is to see women as being inferior to men.

enhanced by increased access to and opportunities for education. Moreover, their courage and confidence in themselves would improve, enabling them to aspire to elective positions. In short, with education, women will be better equipped for leadership positions (Okoosi-Simbine 2000, pp 25-44). The most important obstacle to women's participation in politics remains ignorance arising from a lack of or discrimination in education. In general, and in much of the extant literature, literacy is regarded as essential to most forms of political participation and political achievement is largely dependent on good education. However, the numbers of women who cannot read or write, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, outnumber those of their male counterparts (Okoosi-Simbine 2000, pp 25-44).

In almost all cases, women profiled in Jibrin Ibrahim and Amina Salihu's 2004 publication titled *Women, Marginalisation & Politics in Nigeria* are educated. The minimum level of education among them was a primary school certificate (but with wide experience with working with the people) and some of the women have master's degrees, MBAs and law degrees. This demonstrates the importance of education and the need for women to reduce the levels to which they can be marginalised by ensuring that they have a reasonable level of education to help them understand the issues with which they have to deal.

Girls with education acquire the skills to participate in equal decision-making in the home and in the community. Indeed, all the women who stood for election in 2011 were (formally) educated.

Various efforts have been made to ensure the active attendance of girls at educational institutions at all levels. Among these are scholarships and laws forbidding early marriage (Agbu 2006, p 53). A National Gender Policy has been developed and is currently in use. In 2008 the Strategic Implementation Framework and Plan was drafted. It sets out the specific objectives, targets and monitoring framework needed to implement the gender policy and guide activities towards eliminating discrimination and improving the participation of women in national life (Nigeria MDG Report 2010, p 24).

Educated women who are in the public eye can be role models for younger girls and are an important source of inspiration. Unfortunately, the fewer there are, the less impact they have. Mwangola (2006, p 6) has observed correctly that since the 1985 UN Women's Decade, popularly referred to as Forum '85,

[what] has not changed much is the dearth of informed discourse on female African role models, whose greatest legacy is a gift of inspiration and unshakeable determination in the face of the greatest of odds. From this perspective, every political experience and story is valuable; even the failures, the missed opportunities, the wrong

decisions; the weaknesses become lessons for the present, to be applied to the many battles of the twenty-first century.

Lack of education and the inequality it breeds has been linked to increasing poverty (*Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies*). In the view of Gouws (2006, p 5) the biggest obstacles for women are related to the neo-liberal macroeconomic policies which became prominent in the 1980s and have become increasingly problematic because of increasing privatisation, profit-driven markets and the roll-back of the state. The resulting widening income inequalities are responsible for a lack of or inadequate safety nets for poorer households. Women do not have productive resources such as land and the economic resources available to them are limited and are, as in the case of inheritance, subject to the whims of men. Their impoverished socio-economic status means that women cannot engage in politics in the same way as men do.

Nowhere is this handicap more obvious than in the excessive monetisation of politics such as that in Nigeria. This has the effect of discouraging the best but poorest from participating in politics and making a meaningful contribution to quality governance. This, in turn, makes it difficult to deliver sustainable democracy, makes the governance process warped and expensive and makes it difficult for the electorate to demand accountability from politicians as their consciences are sold (Okoosi-Simbine 2006).

According to the then minister of women affairs, Josephine Anenih, quoted in *The Guardian* (19 April 2011, p 12), the number of women who stood for office in political parties far outweighed the number who won positions in party primaries. Moreover, most of those who stood did so on the backs of men, as wives, daughters, sisters or other close relatives, and relied on the men's strong economic bases, thus confirming that money not only plays a critical role in politics in Nigeria but that it is less available to women than to men, which is a factor in their marginalisation in the world of politics.

Reasons for women's disadvantaged financial position range from cultural issues (such as inheritance) to societal (such as discrimination in lending) (Okoosi-Simbine 2006). In short, an important factor inhibiting political participation is the cost of contesting elections. The social and economic inequalities that exist between men and women must be addressed.

## PROGNOSIS

In many countries greater involvement of women, whether as a result of a quota system or affirmative action or sheer individual effort, has led to enabling conditions for gender equality. In such contexts, more women-friendly legislation



such as gender analysis of budgets (see, eg, Okanya, Osy, Akanji & Simbine 2007) and budget initiatives and national machinery to monitor gender equality has been put in place.

A contributing factor to the institutionalisation of gender, according to True (2003, p 374), is the prevalence of gender mainstreaming discourse that attempts to integrate gender concerns into everyday work and government procedures. The language of women's rights and gender equality, the proliferation of women's networks and transnational links and a growing number of gender sensitive women and men in global governance leadership positions have also been helpful.

The poor performance of women in the 2011 elections is likely to be repeated in the next general elections, in 2015, if nothing is done in the interim. In order to reach the target of 35% outlined in the National Gender Policy, 536 of 1 535 positions would have to be occupied by women, while to meet the international target of 30% the figure would have to be 460. What can be done to bring real change to gender representation in the short term and, ultimately, to gender equality?

From a rights-based perspective, it is critical that such equality be achieved. The rights of women are neither recognised nor respected, especially in rural areas. Various degrees of sex discrimination still prevail and women's voices are faint, rarely heard, and poorly represented on public issues. Avenues for complaint and redress must be put in place and followed up by women's groups.

Since many of the (older) political parties claim in their manifestoes that they will uplift the lot of women, it can thus be argued that many women base their decisions on which party to vote for on the planks relating to women's upliftment or empowerment. There needs to be commitment to gender equity concerns and not mere lip service and parties must implement affirmative action. In addition, women's groups need to take parties to task and demand their rights.

Parties should also make a deliberate effort to enlighten the public about programmes that support women's empowerment and general acceptance in the public sphere. A census of card-carrying members of political parties by gender needs to be carried out to determine the levels of gender imbalance and devise appropriate measures to deal with them. Parties should also mobilise more women and equip them with the necessary political skills, knowledge, financial support and sponsorship.

According to the Nigeria MDG Report (2010, p 24), another step towards achieving gender justice in Nigeria would be to teach political parties about gender, women's political participation and women's impact on democracy and good governance. In addition, aggressive social engineering is needed to create internal party mechanisms and structures that are responsive to women



and indicate commitment to increasing gender equity and women's political participation. Furthermore, there is a need to continue to identify those social, economic, traditional, cultural and religious factors that militate against gender equality and develop appropriate programmes to address them.

President Jonathan has promised that at least 35% of appointed positions will go to women; reserving political and appointed positions based on merit might be a good way to promote women as role models for public political office. Appointing women to certain positions may lead to interest in or exposure to the possibilities of their standing for election and appointing more women to party leadership is likely encourage more to participate in (elective) politics. Monitoring elections with a view to addressing violence throughout the period is crucial.

Finally, as Nigeria prepares for future elections, some of the recommendations of the Electoral Reform Committee are relevant. They include:

- gender balance in the leadership of the reconstituted INEC;
- at least one-third of INEC's 774 local government electoral officers should be women;
- the adoption of alternative forms of electoral system such as modified proportional representation for legislative elections at federal, state and local government levels to promote and enhance women's representation by ensuring that 30% of party lists are reserved for women, without prejudicing their right also to compete for representation under the first-past-the-post system;
- Civil Society Organisations and the United Development Fund for Women, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the National Commission for Human Rights, should continue with their efforts to enhance the participation of women in the country's public life, notably in the area of sustained nationwide campaigns and political education targeting the participation of women as voters and as candidates; and
- special consideration should be given women in the appointment of ministers at federal level and commissioners at state level.

## CONCLUSION

Gender balance in politics and elections is essential for the achievement of developmental goals. Unfortunately, there has been a slight drop in the number of women in elected positions following the 2011 elections and Nigeria is a long way from meeting the international target of 35% and is lagging behind less well-endowed African countries.

Factors that account for this situation include structural issues of religion and culture, women's lack of access to funds, godfatherism in the political parties and the undemocratic disposition of party leaders, political and electoral violence, and vote buying.

Since democracy relies on the principles of liberty, equality and full participation of all citizens in government activities, the under representation of women in politics casts doubt on Nigeria's democratic credentials.

The needs and interests of women will remain peripheral until they constitute a critical mass in decision-making processes and leadership positions. Such a shift will involve voicing women's interests, experiences and perspectives and, in doing so, improving the political, governance and developmental process.

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