

## **Women's Political Participation in Ondo State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Women's participation in politics is an important factor which affects women's empowerment. During electioneering campaigns and on election days, women turn out in their large numbers with their children to exercise their civic responsibility by voting for the candidates of their choice. When violence breaks out during campaigns or during elections women and children are mostly the victims. In spite of this, political appointments are grossly skewed against the women after the elections. The objective of this study therefore is to find the proportion of women's representation in government political institutions such as the State's assembly, the judiciary and the executive arm of government from May, 1999 to December, 2018 in Ondo State. The second objective of the study is to determine the proportion of women appointed /elected as chairmen in the State's local governments during the period under review. Quantitative data were generated through secondary data collected and the results were analyzed with simple percentage. Findings established that out of the 130 seats in the State's assembly between May, 1999 and December, 2018, women have only occupied just 5% of the seats; which means that within the period under consideration; only 6 women were elected to the house of assembly. In the same period, and in the 9 local governments studied, 110 local government chairmen had been appointed/elected, out of which only two (1.9%) were women. This is obviously a poor representation. It is recommended that women should be more involved and support one another morally and financially in the political arrangements especially at the Local Government level where their impact can easily be noticed.

## **1. Introduction**

Women's political participation in Nigeria is appallingly low when compared with their voting strength in democracy. They take about 50% of the Nation's population. Women in most developing countries including Nigeria engage in all manner of hard labour to provide for their families despite the abuse and neglect they suffer in the hands of their male counterparts coupled with the paltry recognition accorded them in the scheme of things by the society.

Women participation in politics is an important factor which affects women's empowerment. Gender equality in political participation is a fundamental aspect of modern democracy. Under international standards, both men and women should have equal rights and opportunities to participate fully in all aspects and at all levels of political processes. In practice, however, it is often more challenging for women to access and exercise these rights. When women participate in politics, their efforts or contributions are often rewarded with political appointments and they can also stand for elective offices or be rewarded with business contracts. When any of these happens, it enhances the economic wellbeing of the women in particular and the society in general

In developing countries, women have suffered social, economic and political deprivation and neglect instead of being at the fore front in issues that relate to socio- economic and political empowerment. Mamman and Esievo (2013) citing Bala (2001) asserts that for women to participate fully in the development process, they must have the opportunity to exercise their rights, develop their skills and talents and have access to education, health care facilities and employment. She observed that poverty, economic dependency and traditional attitudes are serious obstacles to the integration of women in development.

Article 2 & 3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966 which came into force in 1976 guarantee equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of civil and political rights. The (ACHPR) Protocol to the Africa Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of Women in Africa of 1995, otherwise known as Maputo Protocol, also guarantees comprehensive rights to women including the right to take part in the political process, to social equality with men, improved autonomy in their reproductive health decisions, and an end to female genital mutilation.

At the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, governments emphasized that, ‘Women’s equal participation in political leadership and decision-making is not only a demand for justice or democracy, but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account. However, despite the widespread movement towards democratization, in most countries, women are largely underrepresented at most levels of government. Especially in ministerial and other executive bodies, they have made little progress in attaining political power in legislative bodies (Kijak, 2017).

Nigerian women have the guaranteed rights to participate in active politics and governance by virtue of Section 42(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which states that: “A citizen of Nigeria 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 (Ugwuegede, 2014). In spite of this, women have generally been discriminated against in political process in Nigeria. Ngara and Ayabam (2013) citing British Council (2012) report revealed that Nigeria stood at 118 position out of 192 countries in terms of gender parity thereby lacking far behind African countries like South Africa (43%) and Rwanda (65%).

The government of Nigeria, at the federal executive level, has adhered to the Beijing Platform of Action by ensuring that women fill at least 35 percent of all political posts. This commitment is, however, not met for elective positions at all levels (National Demographic and Health Survey, 2013). Women in Nigeria are predominantly engaged in agriculture and are much less likely than men to be engaged in professional, technical, and managerial fields. Furthermore, women lag behind men in educational attainment, literacy, and exposure to mass media, all of which are critical contributors to women’s empowerment and exert considerable influence on strengthening women’s position in the household and in society in general (National Demographic and Health Survey, 2013).

The United Nations secretary-general, António Guterres’ during the 2018 women’s International Day declared ‘Time Is Now’ for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment. He stressed that there is overwhelming evidence that investing in women is the most effective way to lift

communities, companies and countries. According to him, women's participation makes peace agreements stronger, societies more resilient and economies more vigorous.

In Ondo state, women's participation in political activities and decision making is abysmally low. They are mostly recognized in kitchen engagements, rearing of children and general maintenance of the home affairs.

Despite the fact that the percentage of women running for office is particularly low, women are active at the grassroots level, supporting candidate campaigns and attending rallies in considerable numbers. However, this does not translate into leadership roles in the political sphere. Several factors may be responsible for this, such as socio-cultural and religious beliefs ascribing women's primary responsibility to the home maintenance. Other factors may be economic, educational and lack of family support and political awareness on the part of females, financial resources to run for office. With the cost of campaigns increasing considerably – in part as a result of increased vote buying – women's limited access to financial resources also creates barriers to competing in elections. A main source of financial support for any candidate is either personal wealth or support from wealthy patrons, such as businessmen, to whom very few female candidates have access. In many developing countries it is erroneously believed that only women who are promiscuous participate in politics.

## **2. Statement of the Research Problem:**

Political involvement plays an important role in improving women decision making through their participation in political activities. The condition of women particularly in the third world countries and the under developed world such as Nigeria, do not seem to be very encouraging in this area. When violence break out during electioneering campaigns women and children are usually the most negatively affected. During electioneering campaigns and on election days, women turn out in their large numbers, many of them with their children tied to their backs to exercise their civic responsibility by voting for the candidates of their choice. After the elections, political appointments are grossly skewed against them as women are hardly remembered. The only time women are remembered is when a political rally or campaign is about to take place. This is a worrisome trend in Nigeria. Participation in political leadership is imperative for

women's empowerment because greater number of women in politics will support women's cause at every level (Oxal and Baden 1997).

Little is known about women's participation in politics in Ondo State, to the best of my knowledge no research has been done to cover this area. It is with this in mind that the study has been designed to fill the gap.

Therefore, this research aims to find the proportion of women's representation in government institutions such as the State's assembly, the judiciary and the executive arm of government since May, 1999 to December, 2018 in Ondo State. Another objective is to find the proportion of women appointed /elected as chairmen in the State's local governments during the same period.

### **3. Literature Review**

There have been many empirical reviews about the factors that affect women's political participation. Finance is the bedrock of political activity in Nigeria. Standing for elective positions in Nigeria requires huge capital outlay; many women cannot afford this enormous amount of money required because they are generally poor. Women do not have access to financial resources. Employment opportunities are skewed towards men, which leads to income disparity in favour of men. The cost of realizing electoral ambition is still far beyond the reach of even the most highly placed women in the absence of godfather who is willing to "foot the bill in exchange for unlimited favour when the seat is eventually secured" (Yahaya,2012).

Cultural and religious factors also impede women' participation in politics. There is wrong belief that politics is basically meant for men. Also, there is the erroneous belief that only promiscuous women go into politics. Safe for the wind of modernization blowing in Africa, Islamic religious doctrines keep women indoors. Women are not allowed to go out let alone participating in politics. Women are discouraged from participating in public life from childhood through adulthood by authority figures such as husbands, fathers, mothers and other relations due to cultural image of a virtues woman define as quite, submissive who should be seen and not heard (Muoghalu and Abrifor, 2012).

Involvement of thugs before, during and after elections (Kolawale et al., 2012), and the attendant insecurity such as destruction of lives and properties that characterized a typical electoral process in Nigeria makes politics something out-of-the-way for most women (Ngara et al., 2013). The Nigerian constitution is another important factor which impedes women from participating in politics. For example Olufemi (2006) submitted that the constitution of Nigeria continues to act as an barrier to women's active political involvement as married women are often faced with the issue of constituency, particularly if she is not married from her locality or state of origin as it is often difficult to claim the state of origin where her husband hales from. A married Nigerian woman, who goes back to her constituency or birth/state of origin, is likely to receive the same discriminatory treatment for she regarded as being over ambitious and a "non-indigene" by her own state of origin.

Low or lack of education is also an important factor that prevents women from active participation in politics and decision making. When you educate a woman you educate a whole nation. Lack of education reduces women's self esteem. This further reduces their level of self confidence. A survey by the National Planning Commission indicates that 50% of women had no formal education (Okpilike and Abamba, 2013).

The study relied on the feminist theory (Nzomo, 1995). Feminist ideology means agitation for women's economic, social, legal, political, educational rights which will lead to their empowerment vis-a-vis development. The theory depicts the persistent and the structures in society that support this domination and subordination. The feminist perspective examines the many similarities between the sexes. The theory reveals that men are not superior to women, hence they should be treated equally. It submits that women and men do not possess unequal potential for individual development. Differences in the realization of that potential, therefore, must result from externally imposed constraints and from the influence of social institutions and values.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

Ondo state falls within the South-Western Nigeria with a population of about 3,441,024 of which women form almost half of this population (1,679,761).The state comprises of three senatorial districts with each district consisting of six Local Government Areas (LGAs).

The Research is based on secondary data for both objectives. In achieving the first objective, we collated the materials collected from ministry of information to establish the number of commissioners appointed since May, 1999 to December, 2018 and established the proportion of women representation. We also used the 2018 diaries produced by the Ministry of Justice and House of Assembly to know the proportion of women representation in the two establishments during the period under review.

To achieve the second objective, we randomly selected three out of the six local governments from each senatorial district which brought the total number of local governments investigated to nine. We now went further to compare the number of Chairmen appointed/elected since May 1999 - December 2018 with a view to ascertaining the proportion of women representation.

Quantitative data were generated through the secondary data collected and the results were analyzed with simple percentage

### 5. Data Presentation and Analysis

In table 1 below, it is observed that Ondo State has had four Executive Governors between May, 1999 and December, 2018 and all the governors (100%) were males. This means that for the period of nineteen years no woman governor has emerged in the State. The same goes for the position of Deputy Governor in table 2. The state has produced five Deputy Governors and none has been chosen among the women.

**Table 1: No. of Executive Governor in Ondo state from May 1999-Dec.2018**

No. of executive Governors	No. of Males	No. of Females	% of Females
4	4	0	0

Source: Ministry of information, Ondo State.

**Table 2: No. of Deputy Governors in Ondo state from May 1999-Dec.2018**

No. of Deputy Governors	No. of Males	No. of Females	% of Females
5	5	0	0

Source: Ministry of information, Ondo State

In table 3 below, we looked at the number of commissioners appointed by the fourth republic governor, Chief Adefarati. He appointed ten commissioners and all of them (100%) were males.

Not even a single woman was appointed. It is clear that the government was not gender sensitive as women were completely left out in the appointment.

**Table 3: No. of Commissioners during Gov. Adefarati’s Regime from May 1999-May 2003**

No. of commissioners	No. of Males	No. of Females	% of females
10	10	0	0

Source: Ministry of information, Ondo State

The number of commissioners in the fifth republic was also examined. The government of Dr. Olusegun Agagu had about 11 commissioners as seen in table 4 below. Women were marginally represented in the government as only two slots representing (18.2%) were allocated to them while men took nine slots representing 81.8 %.

**Table 4: No. of Commissioners during Gov. Agagu’s Regime from May 2003-Feb. 2009**

No. of commissioners	No. of Males	No. of Females	% of females
11	9	2	18.2

Source: Ministry of information, Ondo State

The sixth and seventh republic was the period of Dr. Olusegun Mimiko who was the governor for a period of eight years. This is shown in table 5 below. Governor Mimiko made 44 very important appointments which included commissioners, secretary to the government, special advisers and chief of staff during his tenure. In this array of appointments, only three (6.8%) were women. The rest 93.2 % represented the men.

**Table 5: No. of Commissioners during Gov. Mimiko’s Regime, Feb. 2003-Feb. 2017**

No. of commissioners	No. of Males	No. of Females	% of females
44	41	3	6.8

Source: Ministry of information, Ondo State

The eighth republic commenced from February, 2017 when Governor Akeredolu (SAN) appointed 18 commissioners and only one position representing 5.6% was given to women while 17 portfolios representing 94.4 % allocated to their men counterpart. This is represented in figure 6 below

**Table 6: No. of Commissioners during Gov. Akeredolu’s Regime, Feb. 2017-Dec. 2018**

No. of commissioners	No. of Males	No. of Females	% of females
18	17	1	5.6



Source: Ministry of information, Ondo State

There are twenty six assembly members in each republic which covers a period of four years as seen in table 7 below. Between 1999-2003 all the assembly members were men while women did not occupy a single seat. In 2003- 2007 and 2007 – 2011, the women occupied one seat each for the two periods, representing only 3.8 % while the men occupied 96.2% seats. In 2011 - 2015 and 2015 – 2019 the women were given two seats each for the two periods representing 7.7% as compared with men who occupied 24 seats representing 92.3%.

**Table.7: Number of Seats in Ondo State House of Assembly**

Period	No. of seats	No. Occupied by Males	No. Occupied by Females	% Occupied by females
1999-2003	26	26	0	0
2003-2007	26	25	1	3.8
2007-2011	26	25	1	3.8
2011-2015	26	24	2	7.7
2015-2019	26	24	2	7.7

Source: 2018 Ondo State House of Assembly Diary.

**Table 8: Chief Judges of Ondo State 1999- Dec. 2018**

No.of Chief Judges	No. of Males	No. of Females	% of Females
6	5	1	16.7

Source: 2018 Ondo State Ministry of Justice Diary.

Table 6 above shows that from 1999-2018, six Chief Judges were appointed in Ondo state and only one was a female, representing just about 17%. The men have occupied the position five times representing 83.3 %.

To achieve the second objective, we visited information departments of three of the six local governments in each senatorial district. The local governments visited in the North senatorial district are Owo, Akoko North West and Akoko North East. From their record, each of these local governments has had thirteen, nine and ten local government Chairmen respectively either

by appointment or by election. Regrettably, women have not been given the opportunity to occupy the position in any of the three local government areas. Table 9 below explained this.

**Table 9. Ondo North Senatorial District: May 1999-Dec. 2018**

Name of LGA	No. of Chairmen	No. of Males	No. of Females	% of Females
Owo	13	13	0	0
Akoko North west	9	9	0	0
Akoko North east	10	10	0	0

Source: LGAs' Records

In Ondo central senatorial district as shown in table 10 below, Idanre, Akure South and Ondo West local government areas have had seventeen, ten and fourteen Chairmen respectively. Sadly, only Akure local government has women been marginally represented having had one female chairperson, representing only 10%.

**Table 10. Ondo Central Senatorial District: May 1999-Dec. 2018**

Name of LGA	No. of Chairmen	No. of Males	No. of Females	% of Females
Idanre	17	17	0	0
Akure South	10	9	1	10
Ondo West	14	14	0	0

Source: LGAs' Records

In Ondo South senatorial district, Okitipupa, Ilaje and Odigbo local government areas have had eleven, sixteen and ten chairmen respectively, out of which women have been chosen twice in Okitipupa local government, representing just 18% of the total appointments in the period under review. Women have not been represented at all in the other two local governments. This is shown in table 11 below

**Table 11. Ondo South Senatorial District: May 1999-Dec. 2018**

Name of LGA	No. of Chairmen	No. of Males	No. of Females	% of Females
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LGA				
Okitipupa	11	9	2	18
Ilaje	16	16	0	0
Odigbo	10	10	0	0

Source: LGAs' Records

In summary, females in Ondo State constitute almost 50 % of the population; this clearly shows that it is only proper for the State to give same prominence to women in order to benefit from this large percentage of population. In the State, the women have been relegated mostly to subsistence farming, fishing, trading and other engagements. They have less opportunity and less choice in making decisions on matters that affect their lives and their children.

From table 7 above, the house of assembly has had 130 members during the period under review, out of which only 6 females have represented the women fold representing only 4% while men have occupied 124 seats (96%).

The Local Government, from May, 1999- December, 2018 have been dominated by male Chairmen with the exception of Akure South and Okitipupa Local Government Areas that had 1(one) female chairpersons and 2 (two) female chairpersons each translating to only 11% and 18% respectively.

In the same manner and looking at the records of the state House of Assembly for the same period, it was also found that women have been marginally represented.

Like Nigeria, there has never been a female executive governor in Ondo State; the same can be said of the position of the deputy governor. It is worth mentioning that Ondo State has produced 130 members of the house of assembly between May, 1999 and December, 2018. The proportion of women representation is just 5%; which means that in the period under review; only 6 women were elected to the house of assembly. In the same period, and in nine local governments visited, 110 local government chairmen have been appointed/elected, out of which only two (1.9%) were women. This is obviously a poor representation. Women with access to economic, political and

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educational chances are more likely to enjoy self esteem, actualization and enhanced economic status. Therefore, political involvement is a veritable avenue to achieve these ends.

## 6. Conclusion

At the national level in Nigeria, women participation in politics and decision making has improved tremendously, even though a lot still needs to be done. Reverse is however the case in Ondo State because women have been marginally represented in the entire establishments examined in this study. It is therefore correct to say that women still remain highly marginalized in all spheres of socio-economic and political life of the nation at the State level in Nigeria. No doubt, many factors may be responsible for this anomaly. This could be researched into in future. In spite of these challenges, women have not relented efforts not only at ensuring that their voices are heard but to also be involved in major decisions by occupying their pride of place in the political settings of this country.

It is recommended that women should be more involved and support one another morally and financially in the political arrangements especially at the State level where their impact can easily be noticed. They need to mobilize and form themselves into formidable groups to wrestle political power from men, even as it is becoming clearer by the day that men do not have what it takes to take Nigeria to desirable economic and political height. They must be involved in the early stage of political parties' formation, show interest in parties' National and State executive positions in order to protect their interests during the period of nomination. Women must begin to make deliberate efforts at ensuring that specific appointments and elective positions are allocated to women. It will be better for women if these positions are entrenched in the constitution.

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