



WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION IN LOCAL AND STATE ELECTIONS; IMPACT OF WOMEN'S (NON) PARTICIPATION

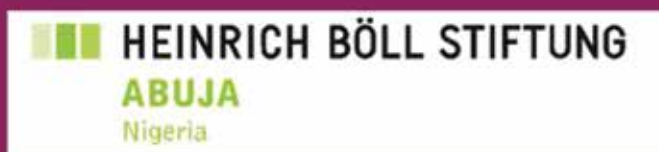
IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

REPORT ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION IN LOCAL AND STATE ELECTIONS, AND IMPACT OF WOMEN'S (NON) PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE. A CASE STUDY OF ABIA STATE, NIGERIA.

By



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ABOUT PROACTIVE GENDER INITIATIVES (PGI)

Proactive Gender Initiatives (PGI) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) established to promote effective, and inclusive democracy through legal advocacy, research, citizens political participation, public interest litigation and innovative approaches.

The organization was founded by Esther Uzoma Esq. in 2010 to pursue an egalitarian Nigerian society founded on the rule of law and constitutional democracy.

The organization was founded on the core principles of:

- **Equity and Inclusion**
- **Teamwork and Love**
- **Professionalism and accountability**
- **Excellence and Innovation**
- **Volunteerism**

We operate by these core values because we understand that the work we do is born out of a burning desire for a citizen-centered

Nigeria. It is from a place of Love for the Motherland.

Our world is made up of men and women, at PGI we believe that this should also reflect in our government and social power structures.

PREFACE

This research investigates the critical issue of women's underrepresentation and exclusion in political leadership roles in Abia State, Nigeria.

Despite comprising a significant portion of the population, women face systemic barriers that limit their participation and success in local elections. This exclusion not only perpetuates gender inequality but also hinders inclusive governance by silencing women's voices and perspectives in decision-making processes. Recognizing this pressing concern, this study aims to fill a crucial knowledge gap by conducting in-depth research on the factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in political leadership positions in Abia State.

By analyzing the participation and performance of women candidates in local elections from 1999 to the present, this research identifies key challenges and barriers hindering women's political advancement. The findings of this research provide valuable insights for developing targeted and effective interventions to increase women's political participation and representation in Abia State.

By understanding the root causes of women's exclusion, this research contributes to efforts to promote gender equality and foster more inclusive and representative governance in the state and beyond.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the field officers for their dedication and tireless efforts in collecting valuable data. We also express our deep appreciation to the community fixers

and participating communities for their invaluable support and cooperation throughout the research process. We are particularly grateful to the Chiefs and participants in the

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research is aimed at assessing women's political participation and representation and determine the impact of women's participation and non-participation in Abia State politics. Abia State had the highest number of female legislators in the country between the 2011-2015 election cycle, as women occupied five seats out of the 24 in the State. However, the situation in Abia State has deteriorated with zero representation in the State House of Assembly. Five objectives guided this study:

1. To conduct a comprehensive research to gain deeper understanding of the dynamics surrounding the performance of women in local government and state elections in Abia State.
2. To research, analyze and evaluate the level of participation, representation, and success of women candidates in local elections in the Abia State from 1999 to date.
3. Systematically investigate and analyze the multifaceted challenges and opportunities that have shaped women's political performance in Abia state.
4. Identify key areas for improvement that will foster a more inclusive and representative political landscape in Abia and Nigeria at large.
5. Inform strategies to enhance women's representation and participation in local governance.

A mixed-method study design comprising the quantitative (semi-structure questionnaire) and qualitative (Focus Group Discussion - FGD and Key Informant Interview - KII) were used to obtain information from respondents. A sampling population of 958 responded to the study questionnaires, while six FGDs and 13 KIIs were conducted in the three Senatorial Districts of Abia State. Some of the reasons provided by respondents why women are no longer elected into political positions cum participate in elections include:

- Gender inequality and discrimination (47-4.9%)
- Lack of interest/political apathy (43-4.5%)
- Limited access to resources and finance (37-3.9%)
- Political violence (35-3.7%)
- Influence of cabals and godfathers (31-3.2%)
- Criticism from men and fellow women (12-1.3).

The respondents emphasized the need for constitutional amendment to be considered to improve Abia State women's participation in politics, which should include 35 per cent affirmative action. Other recommendations made include:

- Financial support from government, donors, family and partners
- Advocacy against negative cultural norms and religious barriers
- Improved security, and
- Political parties should set aside certain percentage of political positions for women.

It is hoped that with the implementation of these suggestions, the state is bound to regain her position as a leading state in terms of the number of women participating in politics and occupying elective positions in future elections.

Keyword: Women, Politics, Political Participation, Elective positions, Governance, Abia State

ACRONYMS

BMGF	-	BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION
CEDAW	-	CONVENTION ON ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
CSO	-	CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION
FCT	-	FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY
FGD	-	FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION
GDP	-	GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT
IDI	-	IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW
KII	-	KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW
MDGS	-	MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS
NGO	-	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION
SDGS	-	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
SHOA	-	STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
SPSS	-	STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES
UN	-	UNITED NATIONS

1.0 BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

This study is part of the PGI's Safe Spaces for Women and Girls project, a strategic initiative aimed at increasing women's participation in governance in Abia State and evaluating whether the 35 per cent Affirmative Action threshold has been achieved. PGI acknowledges the critical need to address the knowledge deficit surrounding women's political participation at the local level, as well as the decline in women's representation in the legislature following the 2023 general elections in Abia State.

Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, women's political participation in Abia State has seen a consistent decline. Despite decades of advocacy for gender equality and women's political empowerment, progress has been elusive. Notably, in 2015, Abia State recorded the highest number of female legislators in the country, with women occupying five out of the 24 seats in the State House of Assembly. However, this representation has dwindled drastically, with no female legislators in the State House of Assembly since 2019.

Adding to this challenge is the lack of data on the performance and participation of women at the local government council levels, which undermines efforts to advance the cause of women in Abia State and Nigeria as a whole. This underrepresentation hampers progress towards gender equality and inclusive decision-making, posing a significant obstacle to national development.

Gender inequality remains a dominant issue in most countries, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria, where patriarchal societal structures often marginalize women. This inequality manifests across various spheres, including politics, where women's participation and representation face significant barriers.

Efforts by governmental and non-governmental organizations to combat these discriminatory practices have yielded limited progress. Patriarchal norms in Nigeria perpetuate inequality, undermining women's empowerment. Societal institutions, including family, religion, legal and political systems, education, media, and socio-cultural practices, have entrenched this subjugation (Afolabi, 73).

Despite these barriers, Nigerian women have demonstrated resilience and capability, challenging patriarchal notions of inferiority. For instance, in Abia State, women occupy significant appointed positions, including 17 out of 24 permanent secretary roles, alongside other critical appointments like commissioners and the Head of Service. However, their presence in elected offices, particularly at the state and local government levels, remains negligible. Since 2019, no woman has been elected to the State House of Assembly, thereby excluding them from key decision-making processes.

The Safe Spaces for Women and Girls project serves as a targeted intervention to explore the underlying reasons for this decline in women's political participation and to empower Abia women to actively engage in political processes. By addressing these challenges, the project seeks to mobilize women and promote their inclusion in governance and decision-making roles.

This study investigates the extent of women's political participation in Abia State from the return of democracy in 1999 to the present, focusing on the factors that contributed to their withdrawal from active participation during the 2019 and 2023 general elections. By understanding these trends, the study aims to identify strategies to enhance women's involvement in governance and decision-making, ultimately advancing gender equality in Abia State.

2.0 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The exclusion and low performance of women in political leadership roles in Abia State hinder the realization of gender equality and inclusive governance, perpetuating systemic barriers and limiting the representation of women's voices and perspectives in decision-making processes. This quagmire is further reinforced by the knowledge gap and absence of comprehensive data on the factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in political leadership positions in Abia State as well as the performance of women in local state elections. These factors hinder the development of targeted and sustainable interventions, impeding efforts to address the root causes of gender inequality in governance and advance women's political participation.

According to data from the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), 15 out of the 36 states in Nigeria have zero women representation in their parliament.

Data from Statista shows that only 6% of the total elected lawmakers in the current Nigerian National Assembly are women. At the state level, the figure is even lower at 4.5%. This low level of representation does not only set the country back in attaining the 30% and 35% affirmative action as prescribed by the Beijing Platform for Action and National Gender Policy respectively, also excludes women from being part of the governance process in the states and at the federal level, despite making up almost half of the population. This decline also hampers progress towards gender equality as well as limits the diversity of perspectives in governance.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 An Overview of Gender Inequality, Women's Participation in Politics and Development

The fate of Nigerian women from the colonial period up to the post-independence era in Nigeria cannot be described as the BEST but of struggles to make ends meet, particularly when one considers the relationship between them and their male counterparts. Lately however and gradually, from 1999 upwards, in the heat of political awareness among the Nigerian women, things began to change and women became conscious of their rights. They felt they had long been marginalized, disempowered and neglected. The contribution of women to national economic development is too great for them to be neglected.

In Nigeria, like any other country of the world, women play vital roles in socio-political and economic development. It is on record that women contribute more than fifty-one percent of food and sixty-seven percent of the rural farm Labour force (Okonkwo, 1991). Despite the huge contribution of women, they are still discriminated against. This includes denial of their rights to education, access to credit facilities, and access to titled land to farming and real estate development. To some extent, Nigeria can be said to have adhered to the clarion call by the United Nations by formulating policies that would encourage the participation of women in politics, economic empowerment, access to credit facilities, access to education, access to inheritance rights, among others. Whichever way one looks at the scenario in almost every state in Nigeria, gender issues are on the front burner because the women are out to assert their rights and strive to claim these rights and exercise them maximally.

3.2 Women's Political Participation in Nigeria from 1999 to Present

From 1999 to date, there has been a clear departure from the past, in terms of the increase in the number of female Ministers. Ekiti, Osun, Anambra, and Lagos States produced Deputy Governors within the period under consideration. In 1999, out of 978 contestable seats in the House of Assembly, men occupied 966, leaving only 12 seats for women representing 1.2% in the 4th Republic. In the same year, out of 360 seats in the House of Representatives, women occupied 13 representing 2.8%. There was upward movement in 2003 where women occupied 39 out of 951 seats representing 4% in the State Houses of Assembly. In the House of Representatives, the same year, women occupied 21 seats out of 339 which represented 3.6% and Senate had 4 seats for women out of 109 which represented 3.7%. In 2007, the 36 States Houses of Assembly seats were occupied by 54 women out of 990 available seats, representing 5.5%. At the House of Representatives level, the number of women increased to 25 seats representing 7%. The number of women also increased in the Senate in the same year by 9 women out of 109 seats representing 8.3%. Now, at the Local Government level which is the closest to the people, out of 774 Local Government Chairpersons elected in 1999, only 8 were women representing 1%. However, there has been progressive increase in the number of appointive positions occupied by women from 1999 till date. (Egwu, 2019). Oluyemi Oloyede also observed that:

"The return of democracy on May 29, 1999, gave hope for a new dawn in the struggle for more participation of women in Nigerian politics. Democracy is about fair representation of all interest groups and gender in society and the low representation of women is a violation of the principle of democracy. Despite every effort put in place, we are yet to meet the 30% and 35% affirmation as contained in Beijing platform for action and National Gender Policy respectively" (Oluyemi, 2021).

He explained further that there have been five administrations between 1999 and 2015. President Obasanjo occupied the office of president between 1999 and 2007, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (2007-2010), President Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2011; 2011-2015) and President Muhammadu Buhari between 2015 and 2023. The position of vice president in Nigeria followed the same trend as that of the president. Four males have dominated the seat since the return of democracy in 1999. Since the return of democracy in 1999, the Senate has been dominated by males.

In 1999 and 2003, out of 130 federal boards of public corporations, only seven (5.6 per cent) were women. During the period, out of 47 cabinet ministers appointed only seven were women, which represent 14.89 per cent. Only one woman was appointed as Director-General of a government regulatory agency and only two women were appointed Special Advisers and Senior Special assistants were respectively. Only six (6) women were appointed as Special Assistants, eight women as Permanent Secretaries, and one woman as Special Assistant to the Vice President. In 2011, more women were given political appointments; 12 women were appointed as Ministers out of 42, which represents 30 percent, and four women out of 20 as Special Advisers. In the Buhari regime, only six women were appointed as Ministers out of 30 ministerial appointees. There has been no governor, deputy governor, no known Chairman in Abia State who is female in recent years, even the State House of Assembly has been male-dominated.

The percentage of women representation in appointment into political office in Nigeria, weighed against same in some African countries, is far from impressive. Cape Verde leads the example for other African countries as it has the highest number of women in ministerial positions on the continent, with nine out of 17 ministers which represented 53 percent, South Africa, has 15 out of 36 ministers are women or 41.7%, Rwanda, has 11 out of 31, or 35.5%, are women, and Burundi, where eight out of 23, or 34.8% of the total are women that should rather be looking up to Nigeria as a model of women's empowerment.

3.3 Women's Participation in Abia State Politics and Governance from 1999 to Date.

Nigeria as a country has witnessed lesser women's participation in politics from the inception of her democracy. The situation in Abia State is not different. The popular Aba women's riot is a typical example of a portrayal of dissatisfaction on the level of political discrimination and humiliation based on gender. Over the years, the amount of women participation in Abia state kept increasing owing to the clamor and campaigns led by different organizations and NGOs for gender equality. Different administrations in Abia state have made some efforts to run a women-inclusive government, yet, women's participation in politics in the State has been affirmed to be relatively low and discouraging.

Currently, out of 24 Permanent Secretaries in Abia state, an encouraging number of 17 of them are women. Women also occupy other relevant appointment positions in the state as Commissioners and Heads of the Service. With this, it will not be out of place for one to say that there is some improvement in women's political participation in Abia State from 1999 till date. There is obvious need for more to be done to encourage more women get into the space of active participation in politics.

- <https://www.thecable.ng/profile-seven-women-buhari-ministerial-list/>
- <https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Nigeria%20%20Buhari,%20Female%20Ministers%20and%2035%20Per-cent%20Affirmative%20Action.pdf>
- <https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Nigeria%20%20Buhari,%20Female%20Ministers%20and%2035%20Per-cent%20Affirmative%20Action.pdf>

3.4 CURRENT WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE SPECIFICALLY IN 2019 AND 2023.

According to data from the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), fifteen out of the thirty-six states in Nigeria have zero women representation in their parliament. Data from Statista shows that women constitute only six per cent of the total elected lawmakers in the current Nigerian National Assembly. At the state level, the figure is even lower at 4.5%. This low level of representation does not only set the country back in attaining the 30% and 35% affirmative action as prescribed by the Beijing Platform for Action and National Gender Policy respectively, but also excludes women from being part of the governance process in the states and at the federal level, despite making up almost half of the population. Since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, six general elections have been conducted and women have vied for different positions but have recorded poor results, minimal gains, and slow progress. For instance, in 1999, women made up only 1.2% of the 990 elected lawmakers in the States' Houses of Assembly (SHoA) in the country. The 2003 and 2007 general elections recorded little increase. The percentage of women representation in States' Houses of Assembly (SHoA) across the country increased to 3.8% and 5.3%, respectively. In 2011, the 36 states in the country had a total of 990 seats in their Houses of Assembly. Out of that, women had only 62 seats, a meagre 6.3%. As worrisome as the numbers were in previous elections, the number of seats occupied by women across the 36 State House of Assembly (SHoA) dropped to 46 in 2015, bringing their total representation to only 4.6%.

A state-by-state analysis shows that Abia State had the highest number of female legislators in the country in 2015. Women occupied five seats out of the 24 in the state. Anambra, Bayelsa, and Kwara states followed with four female SHoA members each. Akwa-Ibom, Cross Rivers, and Enugu came next with three members each. Then Adamawa, Ebonyi, Ekiti, Lagos, Rivers, and Ondo had just two females each in their SHoA. Except for Bauchi, Delta, Edo, Imo, and Oyo which had one female each. Other states which are mostly in the northern region had zero women representation in their SHoA. The situation in Abia State is now different with zero representation in the State House of Assembly elections. The question is what could be the reason for this sudden diminishing return in terms of female representatives in Abia State?

3.5 OBSTACLES/BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ABIA STATE.

The constraints experienced by women desiring to participate in Abia State politics and governance are made worse by the prevailing cultural norms, tradition, discriminatory laws, religion, economic structure, unwritten laws, and insecurity. The challenges facing women are enormous. Research have shown that the under-listed are likely responsible for the huge marginalization of Nigerian women in politics.

3.5.1 PATRIARCHY: It refers to a society ruled and dominated by men over women, which in turn has given rise to women being looked upon as mere household wives and excluded from decision-making process in households. The practice is also believed to affect coming out to vie for political positions.

- <https://www.dataphyte.com/latest-reports/elections/2023>
[elections-with-only-4-5-state-representation-in-2019-how-can-female-representation-improve/](#)
 - <https://study.com/learn/lesson/patriarchy-overview-examples-system.html>

3.5.2 STIGMATIZATION/SOCIAL LYNCHING: Following the way politics in Nigeria is played, it is perceived that it is for individuals that have no regards for human rights and are quick at compromising their virtue for indecent gains. Therefore, women aspirants who venture into politics are looked upon as sexually loose. It has also been noted that social lynching such as the practice of making private sex video by the male partners with sole intention of blackmail has been a major factor militating against the participation of women in electoral competition. Women who suffer social lynching by their partners lose self-esteem and confidence. It will be difficult for such women to declare any political ambitions as the society will challenge them with those scandals .

3.5.3 LOW LEVEL OF EDUCATION: The low participation of women in education is also part of the shortcomings. The National Adult Literacy Survey, 2010 published by the National Bureau of Statistics revealed that female adult literacy rate in English in Nigeria is 50.6 percent while literacy in any other language is 63.7 percent (female adult aged 15 and above). This explains why most women are least qualified for political offices due to low educational attainment. This is also an effect of colonialism, where men were more favored than women

3.5.4 MEETING SCHEDULES: The times scheduled for caucus meetings to strategize and map out political plans either for the pre- or post-election periods are odd, anti-social and are not conducive for many women. Scheduling meetings between 1am -3 am or throughout the night is not favorable to women as it comes with stigmatization and labelling. The slated time are often timing the period women are expected to take care of their children and family. These sorts of schedules are viewed as attempts to side-line women from engaging in the political process.

3.5.5 SOCIO-CULTURAL HINDRANCES TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION E.G. CULTURAL NORMS, PATRIARCHY, AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION ETC:

According to a publication by Abia State Snapshot, Abia State has the highest cumulative rates of economic empowerment for women ages 15 to 49. It has the highest percentages of women's educational attainment (97.9%), participation in decision-making (82.2%), ownership of land and house assets (7%), ownership of a bank account (35.8%), and the second highest percentage of women's employment (73.9%). It also has high rates of gender-based violence (GBV) (33.7%) (2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey).

In Abia State, patriarchal land practices play an important role in limiting women's economic empowerment. In traditional Igbo families, fathers do not give land to their daughters out of fear that the land will leave the family (Opata and Asogwu, 2017). Gendered land practices therefore exclude women from a key source of security and empowerment. Despite these dynamics, Igbo women engage in trade and are influential in politics. Throughout Nigeria, women are exposed to patriarchal social norms relating to decision-making, employment, land ownership, and access to school. Across states, this leads to negative outcomes for women's economic empowerment resulting in women often having limited access to public services, finances, legal and social protection, health services, education, and opportunities to participate in the economy. Women also make up most of Nigeria's poor.

3.5.6 FINANCIAL/ECONOMIC OBSTACLE

-<https://www.zjpd.com.ng/index.php/zjpd/article/download/61/54>
 -<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/236407158>

Damilola Agbalajobi, a political scientist and gender specialist, outlines high cost of politics, poor media coverage of female candidates, and societal factors such as cultural or religious norms surrounding issues like marriage and the burden of care as some of the factors affecting women participation in politics in Nigeria. According to the gender specialist, oftentimes, women do not have enough money to pay for the mandatory expression of interest and nomination forms required by political parties to run for positions on their platforms. Not to mention the huge cost required to run an election campaign. She explained that the poor women's access to education means poor access to gainful employment, which makes it more difficult for them to follow through the process of getting leadership positions.

The latest Labour Force Statistics released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in the fourth quarter of 2020 puts the female unemployment rate at 35.2%. Although, that was a rise from the 31.6% recorded in the second quarter, when this is put into perspective, it shows that many women have limited employment opportunities in Nigeria (NBS 2020). This limits their access to the necessary resources to pursue political ambitions since money is a necessity in contesting for political office, especially in the Nigerian context. The expensive nature of elections is believed to discourage female participation therefore leading to low representation. Speaking on media coverage, Agbalojobi stated that women do not enjoy the same media coverage for political activities compared to their male counterparts. In her view, this also affects women's chances of winning political elections. Desmond Ekeh corroborated this in this article titled "Media and Gender Inequality in Nigerian Politics". According to him, his analysis of two major nationally circulated newspapers in Nigeria, 28 days before the 2015 general election revealed that the female presidential candidate in the race did not receive media attention and her activities were not adequately covered in the media compared with her male counterparts in the other two parties.

In conversation with Dataphyte, Professor Sonaiya Oluremi, a presidential candidate in the 2015 general election also highlighted the issue of finance and the political culture that has been developed over the years as some of the barriers standing in the way of women from participating fully in politics. She explained that the Nigerian state, politically, has been captured by a few people, a political class that has continued to just circulate access to political positions among their members. According to her, some of them have been there for many years and have erected some very strong barriers which many women are unable to confront. One of the barriers being the expensive nature of politics in Nigeria, which keeps women out.

3.5.4 MEETING SCHEDULES: The times scheduled for caucus meetings to strategize and map out political plans either for the pre- or post-election periods are odd, anti-social and are not conducive for many women. Scheduling meetings between 1am -3 am or throughout the night is not favorable to women as it comes with stigmatization and labelling. The slated time are often timing the period women are expected to take care of their children and family. These sorts of schedules are viewed as attempts to side-line women from engaging in the political process.

3.6 POLITICAL INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING AND BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

Political barriers include party structure and institution within political parties and electoral systems (such as low voter card registration and collection process); political meeting time, and meeting venues. Political parties are crucial actors in explaining variation in female representation. They have control of the nomination procedures; they decide whether to have quotas and the type of quotas in the nomination of candidates. Political parties are the strongest actors on the political scene and they play key roles in democratic governance. Political parties are furthermore the main component of parliament and they are in most political systems, the main conduits between decision-makers and civil society.

Women's organizations are generally regarded as core initiative takers in issues concerning gender and politics. This is true around the globe, and in Nigeria, women's organizations have been actors that have grown tremendously in importance after the transition towards democracy from 1999 till the present day. Women's organizations are, like political parties, collective actors. This entails a built-in complexity where it is not clear who is behind a decision and how much conformity plays its role within an Organisation.

3.7 POLICY AND LEGAL HINDRANCES

Non-discrimination and the equal rights of women and men are fundamental principles of international human rights law. Women's entitlement to full participation in electoral processes is recognized in the United Nations and international instruments. In practice, however, women are often marginalized in elections due to gender discrimination and many other social, economic, and political factors. This situation is frequently more acute in post-conflict countries owing to volatile security situations, the prevalence of well-entrenched military factions, large numbers of women refugees, and other circumstances.

According to UN in their publication, "A country's constitution should explicitly guarantee equal human rights for women, including civil, political, and electoral rights. If a constitution does not specifically include such language, this may ultimately prove to be a serious impediment to women's participation". The UN further buttressed this point that the constitution and other elements of the legal frameworks should conform with international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and human rights treaties to which the country is a party, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It is best practice to incorporate such treaties into a country's constitution or to specify in the constitution that the treaties take precedence over domestic law. The election law should be clear, comprehensive, and transparent. It should ensure that no element of the electoral process disadvantages women either directly or indirectly. For example, election laws requiring candidates to post large monetary deposits can work against women. Laws creating too few polling stations can lead to long lines and discourage voting by women with little children. In contrast, gender-sensitive election laws can create an environment in which these and other problems can be avoided, and can even include special positive measures to ensure that women are elected to office. It is important to ensure conformity between the election law and any other national laws on non-discrimination or the equality of women and men. Election laws often authorize election management bodies to issue legally binding regulations, consistent with the law, on voter registration, campaigning, voting, vote counting, complaint procedures, and other issues. These regulations are extremely important. If not carefully drafted, the regulations, like the law itself, may indirectly disadvantage women. When election management bodies are sensitive to gender considerations, regulations that facilitate women's participation may be issued.

3.8 POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND INSECURITY

Political violence and insecurity are the strongest hindrances that limit women's political participation in Nigeria. Elections and campaigns in Nigeria are always characterized by bloodshed, attacks on opponents with lethal weapons, and kidnapping and torture of opponents. Most women are wary of such violent situations and tend to stay away. If elections and campaigns can be free of violence and issues of insecurity, women will be greatly encouraged to participate having a full guarantee that their lives are safe.

3.9 ELECTED WOMEN IN ABIA STATE OCCUPATION OF ATTRACTIVE POSITIONS (FINANCE COMMITTEE, POWER, EDUCATION, OIL AND GAS, ETC.) AT THE LOCAL COUNCIL AND STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY.

Below is the list of some of the various positions that is currently occupied by women in Abia State in the latest administration after the 2023 elections. It should be noted that there may be more but for now, we provide the following list;

- 1 Head of Service: Ngozi Queen Obioma
- 2 Ministry of Women Affairs: Dr. Mrs. Maureen Ijeoma Aghukwa
- 3 Hon. Commissioner for Poverty Alleviation and Social Protection: Mrs. Blessing Ngozi Felix
- 4 Senior Special Assistant, Special Duties: Dr. (Mrs.) Betty Emeka-Obasi
- 5 Special Assistant, Vulnerable Groups & Poverty Alleviation: Mrs. Ifeoma O. Thomas
- 6 Senior Special Assistant, Environment: Prof Ijeoma Iheukwumere
- 7 Senior Special Assistant, Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs: Magdalene Ugoanusi
- 8 Special Assistant, Women Mobilisation: Mrs. Chinwe Kanu Uba
- 9 Special Assistant, Women Affairs: Mrs. Chinwe Onyeukwu
- 10 Senior Special Assistant, Ease of Doing Business: Mrs. Agbonma J. Ukaobasi Esq.
- 11 Special Assistant, Digital Economy - Miss Elizabeth Chibuzor Chijioko.

However, regarding State and Local Government representation, no woman was listed to have been elected to the State House of Assembly, let alone contributing to State decision-making in Abia State.

3.10 THE IMPACTS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS AND THEIR NON-PARTICIPATION IN ABIA STATE POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE INCLUDE IMPACTS ON DECISION-MAKING, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACTS

The government of Abia State stated in an online article published by thisdaylive.com, "Here, in Abia State, our administration is highly gender sensitive and this has seen the increased number of women appointed to the State Executive Council and Ministries, Departments, and Agencies of government".

Providing further details, the Governor added, “It is worthy of note that women occupy strategic positions in health, education, agriculture, and poverty alleviation in the State Executive Council, while out of the total 24 Permanent Secretaries in the state, 17 of them are women”. The Abia Chief Executive pointed out that the front role positions that women now occupy in Abia are unprecedented in the history of the state civil service. He said that Nigeria and indeed the world, owe women a debt of gratitude for their contributions towards ensuring global economic, social, and political development. Improved budgetary allocations to the various sectors that have a direct impact on the welfare and well-being of women and girl-child is also one decision of Abia State government under Governor Otti. He emphasized,

“

By empowering women to participate fully in politics, we stand to cultivate societies that are more equitable as well as sustainable. This will have a ripple effect, resulting in better governance, increased economic stability, and improved social cohesion.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 STUDY AREA - ABIA STATE

Abia State Nigeria was created on the 27th of August, 1991 by General Ibrahim Babangida. Abia State is one of the Igbo States, also known as Ọha Abia with the slogan “God’s Own State” and is situated in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The state is located within the southeastern geo-political zone of Nigeria and lies between Longitude 040 45’ and 060 07’ North and Latitude 070 00’ and 080 10’ East 14. The state is bordered by six states in Nigeria; to the northwest - Anambra State, northeast by Enugu and Ebonyi States, Imo State to the west, Cross River State to the east, Akwa Ibom State to the southeast, and Rivers State to the south (Nigeria, Media, 2023). It is evident that Abia is about the only Southeastern state that has boundaries with the other four Southeastern states in Nigeria. It is believed that Abia takes its name from the acronym from four of the state's most populated regions: Aba, Bende, Isuikwuato, and Afikpo (Afikpo was later joined with a part of Enugu state to create Ebonyi state in 1996) Local Governments. The State Capital is Umuahia while the largest city and commercial city is Aba.

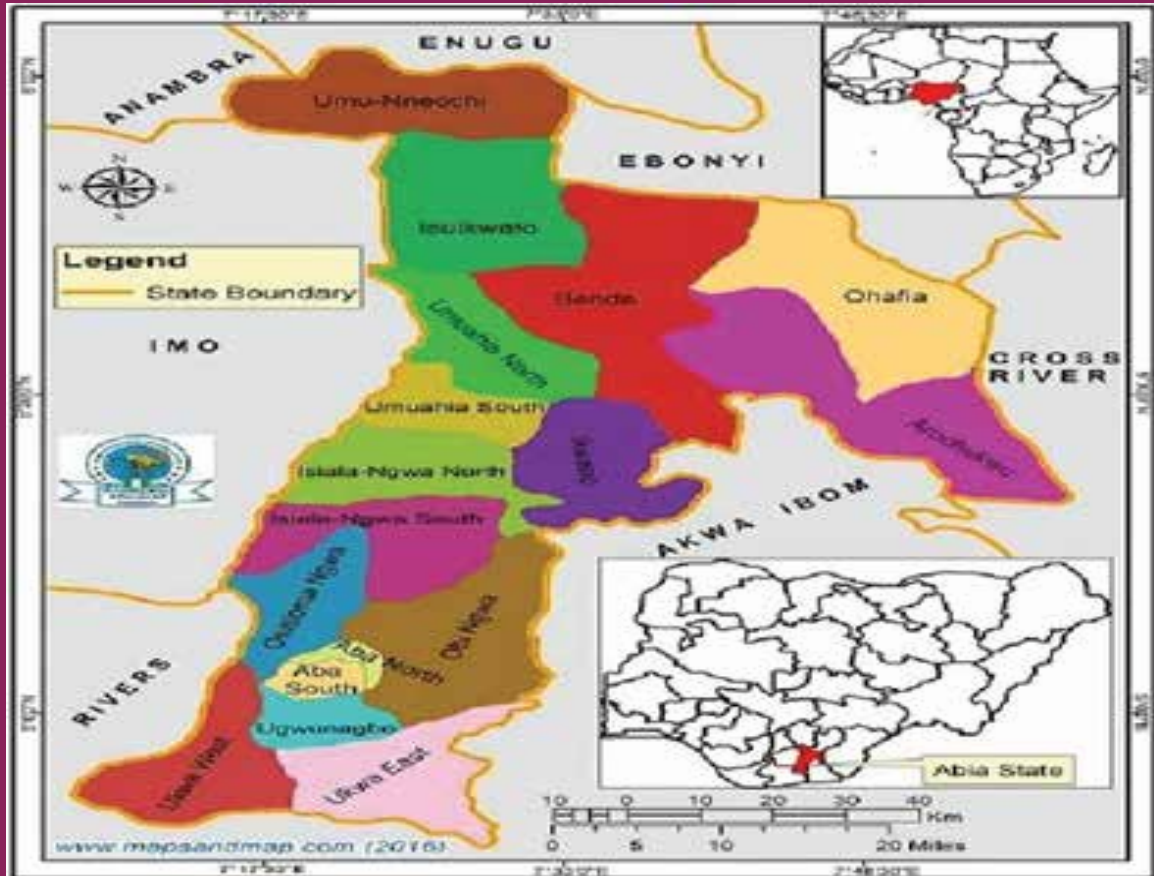


Figure 1: Map of Abia State Showing the three Senatorial Districts of the State. Adapted from, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-study-Area-Map-of-Nigeria-showing-Abia-State-22-Study-design-sampling-technique_fig1_353210380

The Igbo people, who are one of the indigenous peoples of the Southeastern part of Nigeria, make up 95% of the population. Their traditional language, Igbo, is in widespread use. Ibibio is spoken as a minority language, especially in Arochuku. English Language is also widely spoken and serves as the official language in governance and business. In Abia State, over 3 million people are mainly Christians (Owor). In 2016, the State had a population of 3,727,347 and the estimated population as of 2022 was 4,143,100. The State is a commercial hub especially Aba the commercial city and this put the GDP of the State as of 2021 at 22.83 billion dollars and placed it 18th out of 36 States in Nigeria in terms of GDP. The Governors of Abia State have been all males and the Current Governor and Deputy Governor are both males. From 1999 to 2003, there was no female representative, but from 2007 to 2015 there were two female representatives, 1 Female Senator and four Female representatives the number of female representatives kept reducing as between 2015-2019 there was only one female representative but between 2019 to 2023 elections cycles, there is no female representative. This is also the case in the State House of Assembly and LGA administrations, very few females have been elected into political office.

4.2 METHODOLOGY: INSTRUMENTS

The research used a mixed method design which comprises; quantitative and qualitative instruments. The research design used Focused Group Discussions, Key Informant Interviews, and Onsite Visual Assessment as qualitative while questionnaires were used as quantitative. The survey questionnaire was adapted from previous work instruments and modified to reflect the current realities and gaps that are to be addressed in Abia State. The Focus Group Guides elicited from the community information and perception on women's participation in politics and governance in Abia State, the performance of female representatives that occupied public offices, and the policies they supported or instituted to address issues affecting women and girls (See Appendix for a copy of the questionnaire). Key informant interview guides were also developed, and onsite observations, were done to further strengthen the qualitative research on the current reality of women's participation in local and State politics in Abia State.

4.3 RESEARCH PROCEDURE

A total of 1050 questionnaires (i.e. 350 per Senatorial District) were taken to the field in the three Senatorial Districts of Abia State, however, 958 questionnaires retrieved were fully completed and included in the analysis representing a response rate of 91.2%. Mapping was done for each town so that every part of the Senatorial District was represented in the study. This ensured that people from all social strata, income levels, and groups were adequately represented. Simple random and purposive sampling methods were used to select the respondents. This was complimented by detailed observation of the study area referred to here as onsite visual assessment. Two (2) focused group discussions were conducted in each Senatorial District and a total of 13 Key Informant Interviews (KII) were done representing the three Senatorial District. The breakdown is as shown in the table below:

Table 1: Distribution of instruments (questionnaires) FGDs and KIIs per Senatorial District in Abia State, Nigeria

Study Instruments	Abia North Senatorial District	Abia Central Senatorial District	Abia South Senatorial District	Total
QUESTIONNAIRES	337	303	318	958
FGDs	2	2	2	6
KIIs	4	5	4	13
GRAND TOTAL	343	310	324	977

4.4 ETHICAL ISSUES

All participants in the research were treated as partners. Participants in the study were not subjected to embarrassment or discomfort. Any participant who was no longer comfortable to be part of the research was free to leave at any time without any consequences and indeed some could not stay to the end. Debriefing meetings were held for all in their various locations explaining the research procedure. There was no coercion involved in the recruitment process. The participants were recruited in various ways through community channels. The interviewees were picked through a random sampling of households in the community by the community mobilisers. The researchers read out the questions clearly to all the respondents obtained verbal consent to continue before doing so and filled in the responses for all respondents.

4.5 PRE-FIELD PREPARATION

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork, the quantitative instrument (questionnaire) and the qualitative instruments (Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interview (KII) guided) were developed and pretested. Thereafter, there was a two-day online/virtual training for research supervisors and research assistants. A training manual was designed that consisted of different topics on quantitative and qualitative study as well as the mixed study design, including Understanding baseline surveys, Importance of baseline, Qualities of a research assistants, Ethics of research, understanding research questionnaires, Focus groups discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). There was also, hands-on practical section for the questionnaires, FGD and KII guides. The FGD comprised of, the FGD participants, FGD facilitator, FGD notetaker, FGD discussion guides, FGD phases, FGD sites, FGD sessions, Organizing FGD notes, and FGD summary. This was also applicable to the KII.

5.0 DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

5.1 GENERAL INFORMATION OF RESPONDENTS

The outcome of the analysis indicated that 591(61.7%) of the respondents were females, 362(37.8%) were males, and 5 (0.5%) chose not to disclose their gender (Table 2). The age category of respondents shows that 403(42.1%) were between ages 18-34 years, 309 (32.3%) were between 35-44 years of age, 125(13%) were aged 45-54 years, 109(11.4%) were aged 55-64 years and 12(1.3% were 65 years and above). In terms of marital status, more respondents, 531 (55.4%) were married, 359(37.5%) were single, 38(4%) were widowed, 16(1.7%) were divorced, while 14(1.5%) were separated.

The finding shows that the top five educational levels of respondents were as follows; More, 352(36.7%) of the respondents hold a Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Arts degree, this was seconded by 283(29.5%) of the respondents with National Certificate in Education (NCE)/ National Diploma (ND)/ Higher National Diploma (HND) or School of Nursing certificates. Also, 200 (20.9%) of the respondents had completed secondary education, 73(7.6%) were studying or have postgraduate degrees, and 32(3.3%) had no formal education.

Regarding the occupation of respondents, more of the respondents representing 29.2% (280) were either businessmen and women or into trading and self-employed. This was followed by 251 (26.2%) that were employed in Government and Public Service. However, 75 respondents were students, 73 were artisans including fashion designing, tailoring, hairdressing, mechanics, electricians, and so on; 68 respondents were in the education sector including head teachers, teachers, and lecturers; 64 were health personnel including doctors and nurses, 43 were employed in the private sector including banks, 38 were into agriculture, while 20 respondents were unemployed, full-time housewives or have retired from service and were living on their pension. As seen on the table, most of the respondents are of the Christian religion, followed by those that practice the African religion and Islam as well as those without religion made up 1% of each of the respondents.

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Data of Questionnaire Respondents

Variable	Value	Freq.	Percentage
Sex	Male	362	37.8
	Female	591	61.7
	Prefer not to say	5	0.5
Age	18 – 34 Years	403	42.1
	35 – 44 Years	309	32.3
	45 – 54 Years	125	13
	55 – 64 Years	109	14
	65 Years and above	12	1.3
Marital Status	Married	531	55.4
	Single	359	37.5
	Divorced	16	1.7
	Separated	14	1.5
	Widowed	38	4
Educational Level	No formal education	32	3.3
	Primary/Standard (completed)	3	0.3
	Secondary School (completed)	200	29.5
	NCE/ND/Nursing School	283	29.5
	Undergraduate	14	1.5
	B.Sc./B.A.	352	36.7
	M.Sc./M.A./PhD/Post-Graduate	73	7.6
	Didn't say	1	0.1
Occupation	Civil/Public Servants	251	26.2
	Private Sector Employees	43	4.5
	Self-employed/Business/Trading	280	29.2
	Artisans (Tailors, Hair-dresser etc.)	73	7.6
	Education Sector	68	7.1
	Consultants/Contractors (Researchers, Engineers, etc)	30	3.1
	Doctors/Nurses/Health personnel	64	6.7
	Farmers (Peasant/Commercial)	38	4
	Unemployed/Housewives/Pensioners	20	2.1
	Students	75	7.8
	Media Personnel (Journalists etc.)	6	0.6
	Others (Footballer, Football Coach, etc.)	4	0.4
	Didn't say	6	0.6
Religious Belief	African Traditional Religion	25	2.6
	Christianity	931	97.2
	Islam	1	0.1
	None	1	0.1

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Data of Questionnaire Respondents

STATE OF ORIGIN	FREQ.	PERCENTAGE	LGA OF ORIGIN	FREQ.	PERCENTAGE
Abia State	917	95.8	Abia North	96	10.0
			Abia South	54	5.6
			Arochwukwu	10	1.0
			Bende	62	6.5
			Ikuwano	8	0.8
			Isialangwa North	6	0.6
			Isialangwa South	33	3.4
			Obongwa	3	0.3
			Ohafia	240	25.1
			Old Umuahia	2	0.2
			Olokoro	2	0.2
			Osisima	9	0.9
			Ugwunabo	5	0.5
			Ukwa West	112	11.7
			Ukwa East	40	4.2
			Umuahia North	44	4.6
			Umuahia South	190	19.8
			Umunne	1	0.1
Abuja	1	0.1	Bwari FCT	1	0.1
Akwa Ibom	2	0.2	Ikono	1	0.1
			Ikot Ekpene	1	0.1
Anambra	2	0.2	Nnewi North	1	0.1
			Oba	1	0.1
Delta State	2	0.2		2	0.2
Ebonyi state	5	0.5	Onicha	1	0.1
			Abakilike	4	0.4
Edo	1	0.1	Uhumwonde	1	0.1
Ekiti	2	0.2	Ekiti South	1	0.1
			Oye	1	0.1
Enugu	3	0.3		3	0.3
Imo state	10	1.1	Owerri	2	0.2
			Ngor Okpala	2	0.2
			Isiala Mbano	4	0.4
			Nwangele	2	0.2
Lagos state	3	0.3	Alimosho	2	0.2
			Surulere	1	0.1
Osun	2	0.2	-	2	0.2
Oyo	1	0.1	-	1	0.1
River State	7	0.7	Obio Akpor	5	0.5
			Port Harcourt	2	0.2
Total	958	100.0	Total	958	100.0

Data on the respondents' states of origin shows that they were from 13 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Further breakdown shows that most of the respondents represented by 917 (95.8%) of the respondents were from Abia State; 2 (0.2%) were from Akwa Ibom State, Anambra State, Delta State, Ekiti State and Osun State respectively; 1 (0.1%) were from FCT, Edo State, and Oyo State respectively. Enugu and Lagos State had 3 (0.3%) respondents each; Ebonyi State had five (5) respondents, Rivers State had seven (7) respondents and 10 (1.1%) respondents were from Imo State Nigeria (Table 3).

5.2 WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

Findings illustrated in Figure 1 reveal that there has been significant improvement in women's participation in politics in Abia State since 1999 when democracy returned to date as was affirmed by 260 (27.1%) of the respondents. This was followed by 257 (26.8%) who said the improvement has been very significant, unlike 211 (22%) and 230 (24%) who stated that the improvement observed in Putting records straight, KII and FGD participants acknowledged a rise in level of participation by women in 2015, that is, the administration of Goodluck Jonathan: "Since 2015 more women have woken up to participate in politics, before then, they were sleeping" (FGD Isialangwa South Respondent).

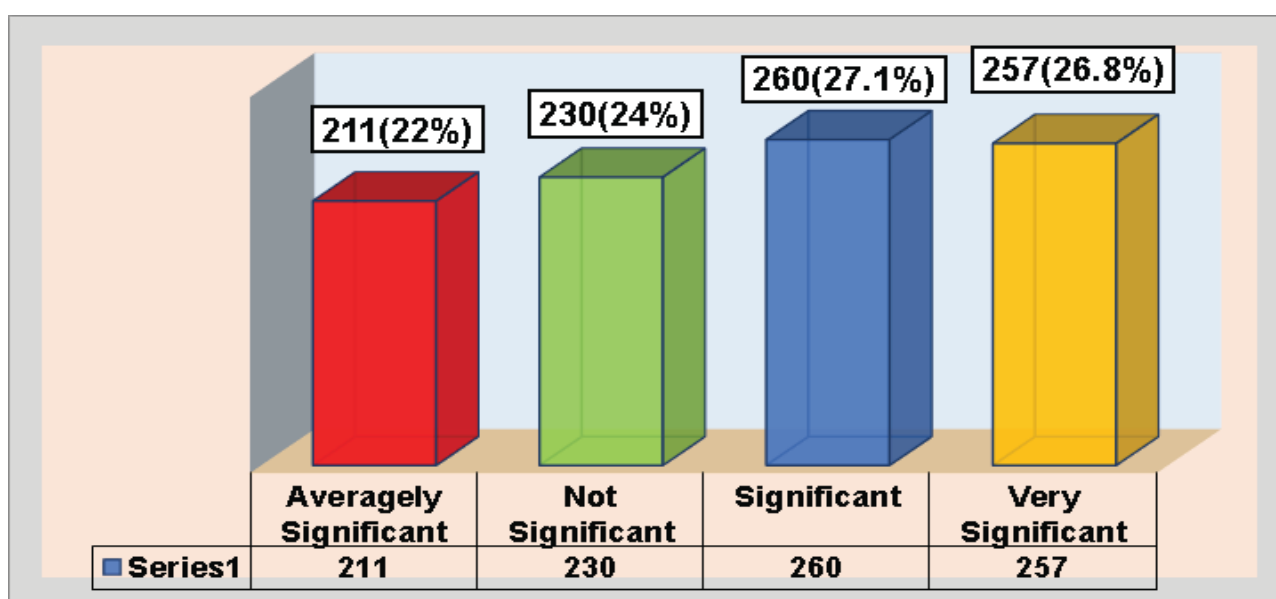


Figure 1: Respondents are aware of women elected into political positions at local, and State levels in Abia State since 1999 to date

26 DID THE NUMBER OF WOMEN WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE 2019 AND 2023 ELECTIONS IN ABIA STATE INCREASE OR DECREASE, MEASURED AGAINST THE RECENT AND REMOTE PAST?

Although the questionnaire data shows (Figure 2) that 414 (43%) believe the number has increased and 359 (38%) said it has not increased, (19% not knowing whether it has increased or not), the consensus of KII and FGD respondents shows that the number has drastically decreased: After the Goodluck Jonathan's administration, the number of women in Abia State politics has continued to decline till date. Right now, we don't even have one, not even one. You will see from the party level; women have not been given a fair share in the party primaries. (Umuahia KII Respondent)

I can say that there has been a time in Abia, no doubt, like in the last 2011 to 2015, our House of Representatives in Abia were mostly women. We had Nkeiruka Onyejocha at the House of Rep, Nnenna Ukaeje representing Bende. Then we had some few women in the House of Assembly, Dr. Blessing Nwagbara and few other women that distinguished themselves in one position or the other. But right now, I can't exactly say but then there has been a sharp decline. We don't have any woman representing us either in the Senate or House of Representatives. In the House of Assembly, the case is the same so that is the position we are presently (Umuahia, KII Respondent).

To the question 'Do women in Abia State have equal opportunities to participate in local and State politics as their male counterparts?', the response shows that 600 representing 63% of the respondents said 'Yes', contrary to the 274 (29%) that said 'No' and 84 (9%) that did not know. This implies that no one is restricted from participating in Abia State politics regardless of their gender (Figure 2). Also, 681 (71%) said the participation of women in politics has contributed to improving governance and development in Abia State while only 122 (13%) disagreed; and 155 (16%) could not say (Figure 2).

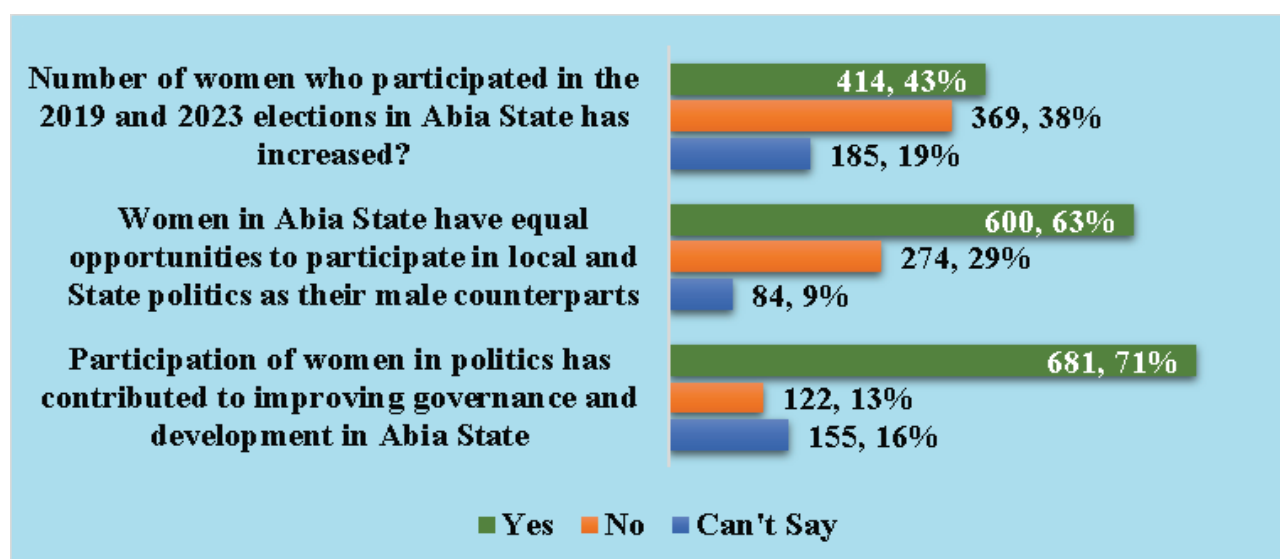


Table 2: Socio-Demographic Data of Questionnaire Respondents

CONCERNING 2019 AND 2023 ELECTIONS, WHAT WERE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES OR BARRIERS, SOCIETAL PERCEPTION ABOUT WOMEN IN POLITICS, THAT WOMEN IN ABIA STATE FACED THAT HINDERED THEM FROM PARTICIPATING FULLY IN POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE IN THE STATE ELECTIONS?

Reasons responsible for less women being elected into positions, as shared by the respondents, included gender inequality, discrimination and marginalisation of women 47(4.9%); political apathy, lack of interest/trust in electoral processes 43(4.5%); limited resources and finance 37 (3.9%); men sidelining women because of the feeling that "Women are not supposed to rule over men" 35(3.7%); political violence/bad politicking 35 (3.7%); the influence of cabals and godfathers 31(3.2%); cultural and societal norms/barriers 29(3%); and Men feeling that women cannot handle political position 26(2.7%) (Table 4).

Table 4: Reason why women are no longer elected into political positions in Abia State

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Women are sidelined by their male counterparts who feel politics is for males alone	35	3.7
Political Apathy & women not wanting to participate/lack of interest/lack of trust	43	4.5
Gender inequality and discrimination/marginalisation	47	4.9
Many women are novice in politics	15	1.6
Men think that women can't handle political positions	26	2.7
Bad/Dirty Political Positions/Political Violence	35	3.7
Corruption	15	1.6
Failure, discouragement, and inferiority complex/are considered invaluable	23	2.4
Fear of men, death, intimidation, and unknown political issue	20	2.1
Lack of strong support from men for the affirmation action of giving women 35% to 40% representation	10	1.0
Influence of Cabals & Godfatherism	31	3.2
Criticism from men and fellow women	12	1.3
Limited access to resources and funding/high cost of running elections	37	3.9
Can't say/No Idea	28	2.9
Religious belief and barrier	3	0.3
Cultural and societal norms/barriers	29	3.0
Do not know	6	0.6
Due to insecurity	7	0.7
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the midst of the politicians, women are scared of participation	1	0.1
family issues; lack of support from their husbands	5	0.5
Fewer women run for elections in Abia	14	1.5
Due to political system of the state, they don't show interest but rather prefer appointment.	8	0.8
Lack awareness, inclusion training and mentorship	4	0.4
lack of policy support and Political will	9	0.9
Lack of representation Woman are no longer adequately represented in political parties or leadership positions	5	0.5
Misconception and misunderstanding	3	0.3
No reason/None	5	0.5
Women are not to be trusted with power/ some misuse it	4	0.4
No response/No answer	478	49.9
Total	958	100.0

The KII and FGD shared elaborate challenges according to their observations and experiences, including:

I. Patriarchal gender norms: a system that structures gender inequality against women. The society believes that a woman or the girl child belongs to the kitchen and should just do domestic jobs whereby not allowing the girl child to go out and experience things. This builds low self-esteem in her. So, it is very difficult for a girl child to participate in politics. Gender inequality is really affecting women in politics. (Ohafia, KII Respondent). The patriarchal gender practice, described as traditional inhibition by Nwagbara says women are not to be heard, that they should not be at the helms of affairs rather, but should rather be heard in entertainment (dancing, shaking of bums and smiling). A KII respondent described the practice that relegates a woman to the kitchen such that when a woman goes out of the norm and tries to do something else, she is perceived as a wild and unsubmitive woman and then seen by men as a threat, as a gender-based harassment.

II. Cultural Practices: In our traditional setting, it is seen as a taboo for a woman to carry and give kola for titled men in local government and the rest of them. So, such things are inhibitions against women (Umuahia, KII Respondent).II. Cultural Practices: In our traditional setting, it is seen as a taboo for a woman to carry and give kola for titled men in local government and the rest of them. So, such things are inhibitions against women (Umuahia, KII Respondent).

III. Violence and sexual abuse against women in politics (Ohafia, KII Respondent).
 “Election is known to be characterized by violence and only few ladies can withstand the violent environment (Umuahia, KII Respondent)

IV. Misconception of relationship between male and female politicians: For the married women, their husbands find it difficult to allow to go into politics because some men believe that most of the women that gets into politics, they get sexually abused by most men in power just to get to a higher position. A KII respondent from Ohafia LGA, however debunked that misconception, “It is not totally true. Most times, it is not that if you get into politics as a woman, you will start misbehaving, no. We have so many great women in politics that, till today, they still have their names intact”. She added, “Then as a girl child, it is actually difficult for your parents to leave you to go into politics. Or maybe you have a man in your life that will allow you to go into politics. People will always go to tell the person things that could tarnish the lady’s image”.

They see women that attend night meetings or travel far for political meetings as prostitutes. They believe they sell their bodies to get political offices. No personal experience, it is only based on the fact that husbands think their wives are loose”. FGD Umuahia Respondent

V. High Cost of Election Process/Financial Constraints:

Most women do not have the money to come and slog it out with the men who have godfathers here and there, who can sponsor them. You know that men can come together, even from another party to make sure that a woman doesn’t come on board. They will sponsor, give in their money and all that” (Umuahia, KII Respondent).

To a large extent there are some bills some women would not personally come up with to run election in Nigeria. I think that is also part of the disadvantages we are having here and it does not only affect the women, it also affects the youths because the cost of nomination and what have you spend through the process (Umuahia, KII Respondent).

VI. Negative Religious Orientation:

In terms of religious orientation, people would tell you that a woman going for late meetings in the nights shows that she is not being respectful to her husband. So, that kind of preaching now cage women. It’s as if you are now showing insubordination to your husband. But in the Bible, women led their countries like Dorcas, Deborah. Deborah was a great judge, she led Israel even if there’s nobody, she was there. And she was married to a man. Why will it now come to our time and our preachers will now come and demonize women. As if when we come to contest for politics, we have gone there to do otherwise. So, such things dampen the spirit of women (Umuahia, KII Respondent).

VII. Traditional Inhibition due to Marriage: according to a respondent,

Women have an inherent problem. For instance, I am born in Umuahia north, married in Ugwuani. When I come to contest for a position in Ugwuani, they deny me the opportunity that I’m not born in Ugwuani, that I, only related by marriage, am coming to obstruct the positions of their sons and daughters. Then, when I come back to Umuahia north where I was born, they say I have gotten married and that is a problem. So, women are on edge, just floating like oil. It happened to me; I’m talking from experience because I had wanted to contest for House of Assembly in 2011. I was coming back from my campaign trip, only for me to see the Council of Chiefs of Ugwuano in my father-in-law’s parlour discussing. What were they discussing? They were pouring libation that no woman married into Ugwuano land that will come and drag positions. My husband was so annoyed. He was like so you are against my wife who is contesting. They said it would be amended. What are we amending? So, those are the problems of a woman. She is neither here nor there (Umuahia, KII Respondent).

VIII. Perception of Women as Having Weak Character: According to a respondent, women are considered by both male and female electorates as weak in character:

So, our people hold it dear in this part of the world that if a woman or a man presents himself, they will likely choose the man because they believe he has a strong character. Our decisions are usually based on who has a stronger character than the others.

IX. Lack of Mentors and Supporters: “Sometimes, women do not have people supporting them. We don’t have sponsorship. We don’t have mentors for women because they already don’t believe in them” (Ohafia, KII Respondent).

X. Absence of State Policy that supports women: “We don’t have a policy that includes women that probably said this percentage of participation in politics should come from the women (Ohafia, KII Respondent).

XI. Resistance by Jealous Husbands: “You see a married woman wanting to contest, then her husband is kicking against it, thinking she wants to be greater than him” (Ohafia, KII Respondent).

XII. Intimidation of Women by Men: “Intimidation, lack of finance, violence and gender issues. They see women as not being strong enough to handle elective positions, hence, refusal to vote for them”. FGD Umuahia Respondent

XIII. Late Night Meetings: “Late night meetings discourage them from participating” ... Also, education, because most women are uneducated”. FGD Umuahia Respondent

5.3 WOMEN’S REPRESENTATION IN LOCAL AND STATE ELECTIONS AND THEIR PERFORMANCES

The estimate of the current number of female political office holders at the Local and State levels provided by respondents shows that 244 (22.5%) of the respondents estimated that 1-3 females occupy political offices; 204 (21.3%) estimated 4-6 females; 120 (12.5%) of the respondents estimate was 10-12 females at local and state level, 51 (2.8%) said >21 females, while 217(22.7%) said ‘None’ meaning no females are holding political positions at the moment, especially at the State level. This is worrisome and requires urgent intervention (Figure 3).

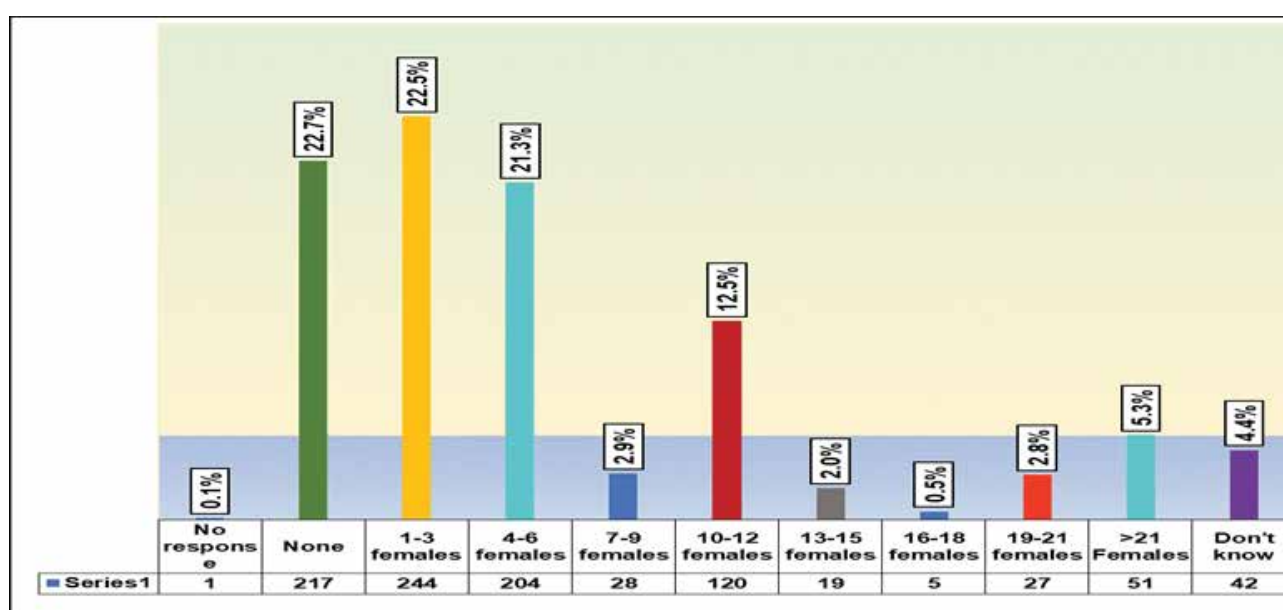


Figure 3: Estimate the current number of female political office holders at the Local and State levels

Table 5: Examples of specific initiatives or policies implemented in the past by elected women to promote gender inclusion and improve citizens' welfare in Abia State from 1999 to date (N=958)

Question 21. Variable	N	%
Organised Orientation programmes/Trainings/Seminars	53	5.5
Promoted widows and women's right	21	2.2
None	103	10.8
Advocated for women's inclusion in political positions and appointment	43	4.5
Women, youth's and family's economic empowerment	123	12.8
Health services, awareness creation and social services	102	10.6
Public enlightenment campaigns/Townhall meetings and home visits	13	1.4
Gender policies and initiatives including GBV, gender equality advocacy, inclusion, FGM, gender budgeting and gender related issues.	96	10.0
Provided welfare for children, women and girls.	30	3.1
Community Development including, Infrastructural development and upgrading in schools, hospital etc.	34	3.5
Advocacy for good governance, leadership and financial transparency/integrity	14	1.5
Supported and increase number of women participating in politics	20	2.1
Girl Child education including scholarships and education reforms, and hygiene promotion	97	10.1
Advocacy for 35% positions to be given to women	16	1.7
Vocational & Skills acquisition programmes for women and youths	37	3.9
Microfinance such as financial education and loan provision for women to start businesses	9	0.9
Supported different form of policy formulation on issues that favour women	23	2.4
Promoted Child's right and prohibition of child's street hawking	14	1.5
Engage in advocacies and activism	12	1.3
Promoted Agricultural initiatives	7	0.7
Help in giving employment to women and youths	8	0.8
Supported women NGOs activities	4	0.4
Don't know	48	5.0
No response	31	3.2
Total	958	100

5.4 PERFORMANCE OF WOMEN IN ELECTED POSITIONS

On performance, 557 (58.1%) said the women representatives in Abia State who held political positions performed better than their male counterparts from 1999 to date in terms of gender inclusion while 223 (23.3%) did not think so; 557 (59.2%) said the women performed better in formulation of people-oriented and pro-poor policies. On the use of constituency funds, 37 (38.3%) believed that women were more judicious than men. And according to 371 (38.7%) of the respondents, women were more accountability to their constituents; only 122 (12.7%) thought otherwise (see Figure 4).

Concerning specific initiatives or policies implemented by elected women to promote gender inclusion and improve citizens' welfare in Abia State from 1999 to date, 123 (12.8%) of the respondents said the elected women implemented women, youth and family's economic empowerment; while 102(10.6%) said healthcare services, awareness creation and social services initiative and policies were implemented; 97(10.1%) mentioned girl child education including provision of scholarships, education reforms and hygiene promotion was undertaken by the female representatives during their tenure. In addition, gender policies development was mentioned by 96(10%); orientation programmes, trainings and seminars initiatives, mentioned by 53(5.5%); vocational training and skills acquisition was mentioned by 37(3.9%); welfare programme for women and children was mentioned by 30(3%) and advocacy for women inclusion in political positions and appointment mentioned by 43(4.5%) of the respondents (Table 5).

The convergent of the FGD respondents' views regarding the performance of women in elective positions, in terms of gender inclusiveness, citizens, welfare and facilitating better policies, is an indication of how effective an elected woman can be in politics, although these views were made in regards to women elected into positions before the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Abia State. That notwithstanding it is a good testament to the stewardship of the female occupying elective positions in Abia State. For instance, a respondent in Umuahia said two of the elected women included women in many things and carried out empowerment for women. Although they also noted that the reason women in Abia State cannot do much is because they are few of them in politics, and their voices are easily trampled upon, majority of the politicians are men who makes bad policies. Therefore, if more women should come and participate in politics, good policies would be actualised.

They have performed so well... Women such as Nkechi Nwaogu and Onyejeocha included women in many places and empowered them". FGD Umuahia Respondent
The Head of Service has been doing her job perfectly. The Accountant General is making good use of her position, she makes good policies, and the Civil Service is reformed". FGD Umuahia Respondent

This was also concurred by respondents in Ohafia North, confirming that women have performed so well when they were given the opportunity.

Firstly, women in politics have generally performed so well and their performance is outstanding. For example, Dora Akunyili, Grace Amah, Nkeiruka Onyejeocha, Nnenna did very well..." FGD Ohafia North Respondent

In agreement with the FGD respondents, the KII respondents said:

I will say they have performed so well. Like during the tenure of Dr. Orji Uzor Kalu, we had the then commissioner for education, Dr Mrs. Ori Obasi. She performed extremely well; she was so good. After her tenure as the Commissioner for Education, she was now given the position of Commissioner for Agriculture and she did very well. Even the gender equality, she did that very well (Ohafia, KII Respondent).

Though they were a minority, at that particular time, the women around them were able to benefit from the empowerments they had. There was development (Umuahia, KII Respondent).

From 1999 till date, we have not had really new names. So, Nkeiruka Onyejeocha presently as a Minister in Abia State. She was the person that supervised the negotiation between the Federal government and the Labour Union that brought about to seventy-thousand-naira minimum wage. Then the people good of Nnenna Okezie, while she was representing them. Same as Nkeiruka Onyejeocha while she was also a member House of Representative for Isiukwuato and Ogbunochie (Aba North, KII Respondent).

5.5 ELECTED WOMEN REPRESENTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN ISSUES

According to 558 (58.2%) of the respondents, the women representatives that held political positions from 1999 till date represented women, children, and community issues well in their respective offices. (Figure 5). Defending their positions, the respondents listed out the outstanding issues that were presented: 8.2% of the respondents listed 'gender inequality and empowerment issues', stating that the female representatives embarked on advocacy for equal rights and opportunities for women, as well as supported women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship and skill acquisition programs (Table 6). In addition, 67 (12%) of the respondents said the women promoted access to compulsory, quality education for girls and women, and scholarships for community members. Another issue listed by 79 (14.2%) was advocacy for improved healthcare services - particularly maternal and child health; while 67 (12%) of the respondents also listed promoting and carrying out poverty alleviation programme, skills building and economic empowerment; including support for women and girl's training programmes, entrepreneurship and access to credit facilities as well as promoting initiatives geared towards improving women/girl's economic independence and self-reliance. (See Table 6).

Table 6: Some of the outstanding initiatives by women appointed into political offices

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Advocated for Gender Equality and Empowerment:	46	8.2
Promoted access to compulsory, quality education for girls and women, Scholarships for community members	67	12.0
Healthcare including Maternal and Child Health	79	14.2
Advocacy for Child's rights and Protection	33	5.9
Initiation of Children, Women and persons living with disability welfare scheme	25	4.5
Initiative for Community Development	32	5.7
Advocated for laws and policies to prevent GBV and Violence Against Women and Girls	35	6.3
Advocated for more Women's Participation in Politics	24	4.3
Poverty Alleviation, Skills building, Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship	67	12.0
Addressed Environmental Health Issues	36	6.5
Good governance, accountability and transparency in the use of public funds utilisation	11	2.0
Advocacy against FGM and Early child marriage	12	2.2
Job creation for Youths and women/girls	9	1.6
Support Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition including breastfeeding	5	0.9
Reduction in Crime rate	2	0.4
Can't remember/No Idea/Don't know	51	9.1
Did little or Nothing	24	4.3
Total	558	100.0

Other issues listed were: policies and programs to promote child's right and protection with the aim of preventing child abuse, trafficking, and exploitation (5.9%); initiation and support for projects to improve rural infrastructure, water supply, hospitals market and schools' renovations, and sanitation (5.7%); advocacy for laws and policies to prevent and respond to gender-based violence as well as supported survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault (6.3%); initiation of activities to promote environmental health issues, addressing environmental concerns, such as pollution and climate change and access to clean water and sanitation (6.5%); and advocacy for good governance, accountability and transparency, particularly in the use constituency funds, using townhall meetings to give account of their stewardship and dialogues at different levels (2%). In addition, 24 (4.3%) said the elected women were vocal and fought for women's participation in politics, (see Table 6).

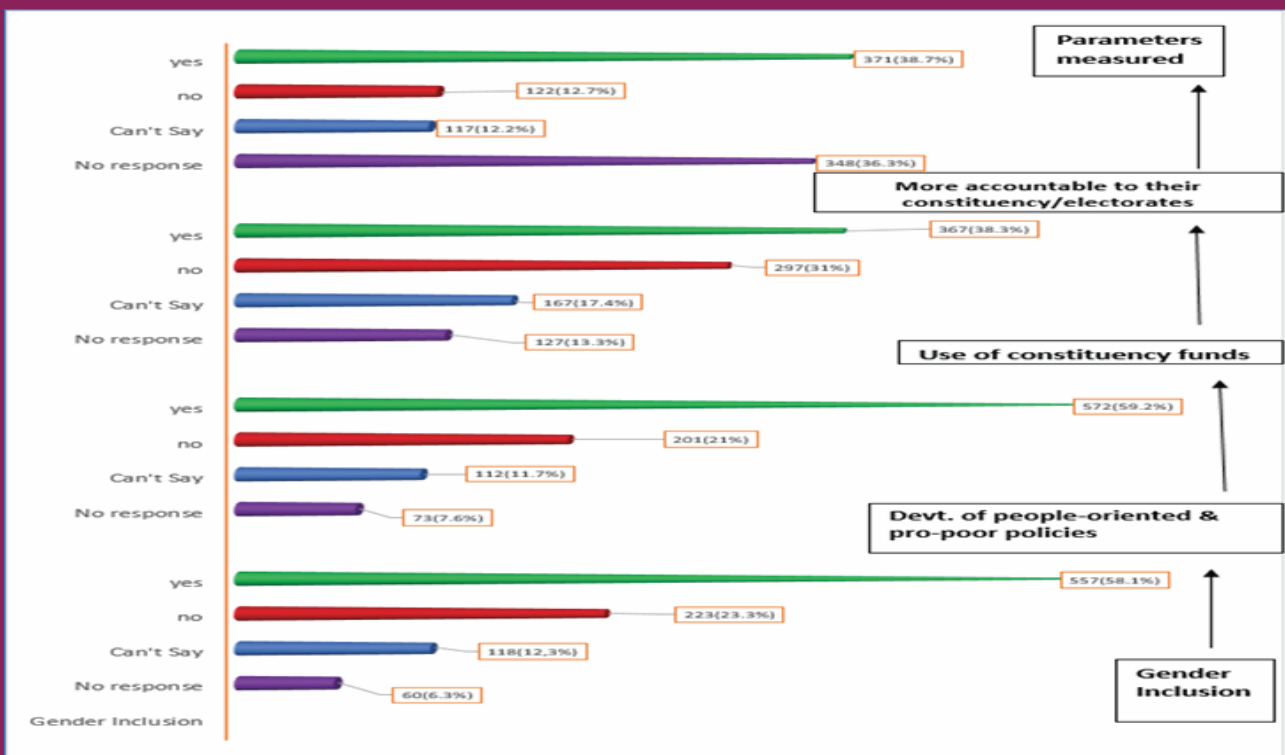


Figure 4: Women representatives in Abia State have performed far better than their male counterparts under the following parameters from 1999 to date

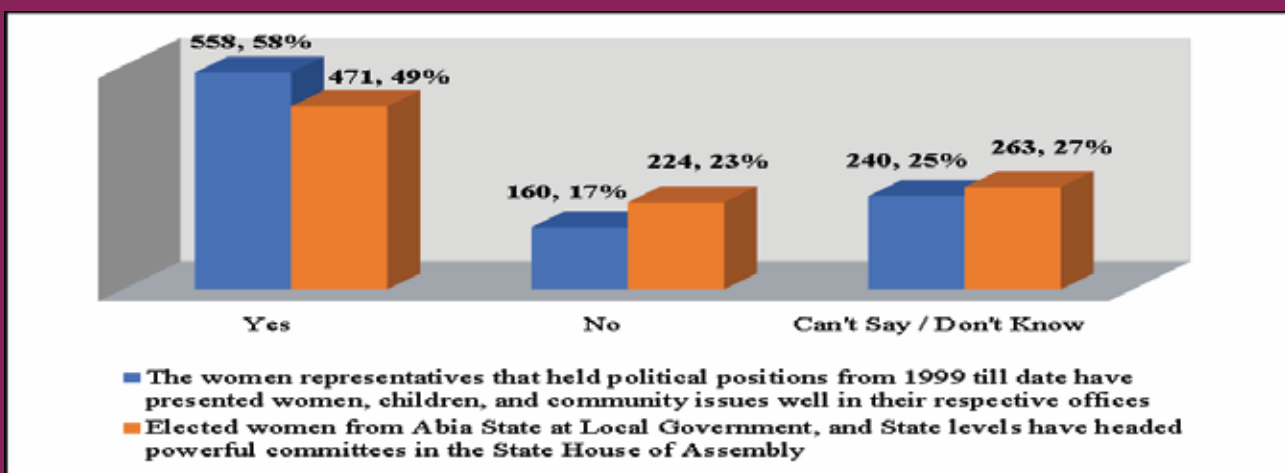


Figure 5: Showing data of women holding powerful positions and representing critical issues

Respondents' perception in respect to the elected women representing women well and presenting issues affecting women appropriately using their political or leadership position was sought and their responses indicated contradictory views. Whereas, most of the respondents said vividly that women representative was not using their offices to present issues affecting women appropriately because they are few in that position being denied 35% of political parties' elective positions; a few on the other hand affirmed that the women representative elected into political offices did use their position to help their fellow women to participate in politics in Abia State. However, for those asserting women were using their office to represent women issues, they added that what hinders their full operation is intimidation, and the fact that few women were being elected into offices.

They are not being given 35% of their quota, so we cannot expect the best from them... FGD Ohafia North Respondent

They are not using their positions to help their fellow women to participate in politics. Intimidation and few women are elected into offices. Afterall, they are minority elected into offices... FGD Umuahia Respondent

5.6 POWERFUL/INFLUENTIAL POLITICAL OFFICES OCCUPIED BY ELECTED WOMEN

How powerful are the elected women? The data showed that 471 (49.2%) of the respondents believed that the elected women from Abia State at Local Government, and State levels headed powerful committees in the State House of Assembly, committees such as Works and Housing, Finance, Budget and planning, Health, Agriculture, Information, and so on at their respective offices while 224 (23.4%) did not agree with that position as 263 (27.4%) claimed they did not have that knowledge (Figure 5). The quantitative data however basically referred to the past as the qualitative data shows otherwise concerning the present. According to the KII and FGD respondents, except in the past, there is no woman occupying any important or powerful position in the State at the time of the research.

Right now, we don't even have any. So, there's no position. Even the Committee for Women Affairs in House of Assembly is been chaired by a man because we don't have any. When they gave us commissioner for women affairs, the woman that was commissioner for health was subjected to probes and every other thing, she resigned. I know that there is one position or the other but those positions are not strategic for them to lend their voices or for their voices to be heard or for them to come out and say that women's folks are well represented. (KII Respondent, Umuahia).

Presently the answer is no. In Abia State presently, we have a woman at the helm of affairs in the judiciary where we have a male Chief Judge, Justice Agbai. In the legislative arm, we have Peter Umahi Uwa and unfortunately there is no woman in that legislative arm. Then in the executive, we have the Governor, Mazi Alex Oti. Where we have women in the executive, they are appointee's, commissioners and unfortunately also two of the Commissioners that were either suspended or resigned were also ladies - Commissioner for Health, Dr. Ngozi and Professor Ihukwe. So, what it means is that while we are complaining of decline, it is actually a decline to an unprecedented level. Then at the local level there is no woman that is occupying any committee in Abia that I know of. I don't know why he also believe that in a state of 17 local government we shouldn't have three or four women superintending their local government (KII Respondent, Umuahia).

There are few women in appointed and elective positions in Abia State... Women in medical line and education are doing well. (FGD Ohafia North Respondent)

No, because of the high cost of form (FGD Ohafia North Respondent)

In terms of election, 'no' but in appointment, there are more. Few women have been elected into offices in the past, although women have been appointed (20-30%). Like the Commissioners and Directors. In Health and education, the Accountant General are women. (FGD Umuahia Respondent)

5.7 SPECIFIC BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES HINDERING WOMEN IN ABIA STATE FROM PARTICIPATING POLITICS

The research sought and found challenges and barriers that pose as obstacles for women's participation in Abia State politics and governance from 1999 to 2015. Political violence, mentioned by 208(21.7%) of the respondents topped the list. The other challenges were high rate of poverty and low financial resource or low economic power as mentioned by 165(17.2%); illiteracy or low education, misconception and misinformation as identified by 154(16.1%); male chauvinism as stated by 132(13.7%); socio-cultural barrier as mentioned by 142(14.8%); religious belief mentioned by 104(10.8%); political parties' policies and practices such as late night meetings was the challenge mentioned by 48(5%) of the respondents and others mentioned political instability and insecurity was the challenge stated by 6 (0.6%) of the respondents (Figure 6).

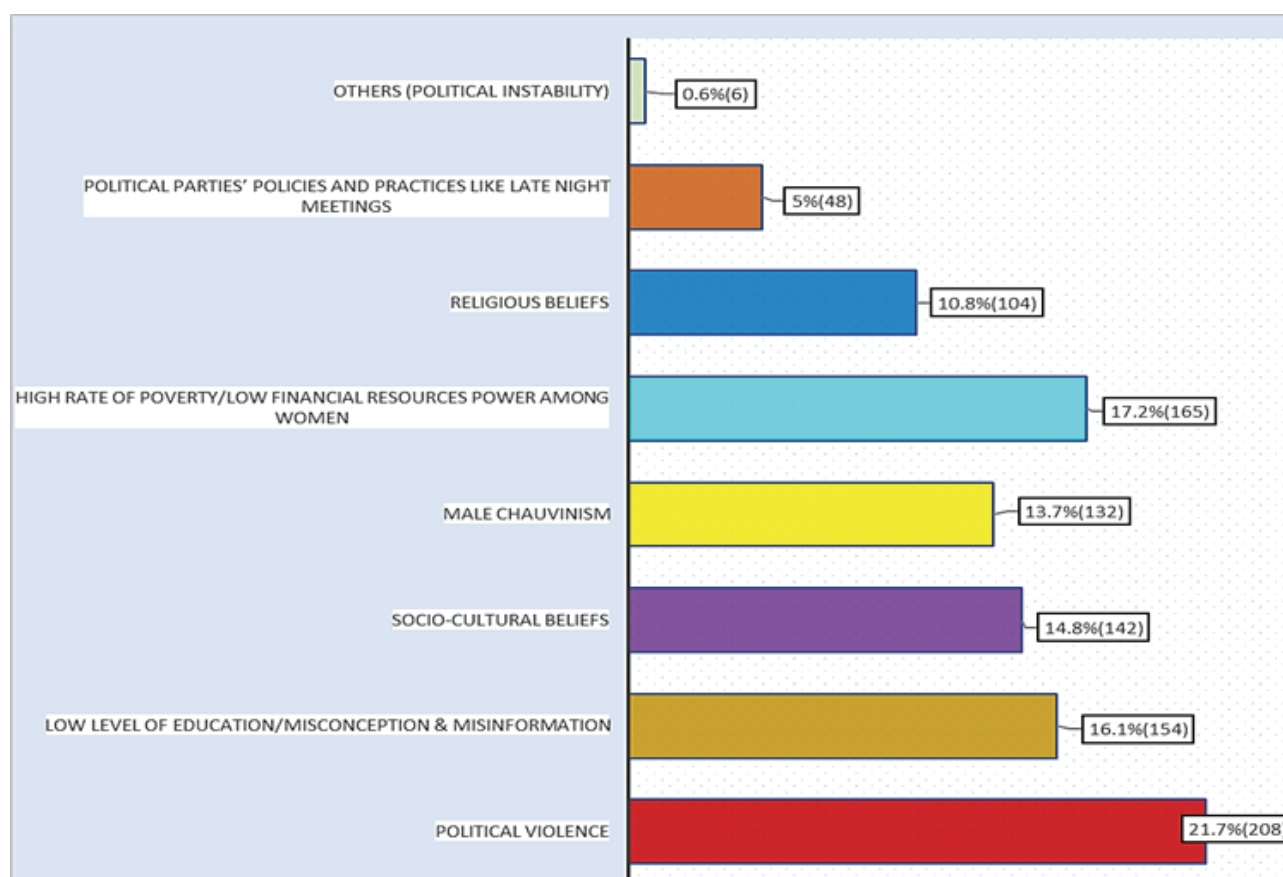


Figure 6: Challenges or barriers hindering women's participation in Abia State politics and governance from 1999 to 2015

The findings from qualitative tools emphasize these challenges. The key informants gave wide range of challenges according to their observations and experiences.

1. Patriarchal gender norms, a system that structures gender inequality against women.

"The society believes that a woman or the girl child belongs to the kitchen and should just do domestic jobs whereby not allowing the girl child to go out and experience things. This builds low self-esteem in her. So, it is very difficult for a girl child to participate in politics. Gender inequality is really affecting women in politics. (Ohafia, KII respondent).

The patriarchal gender practice, described as traditional inhibition by a KII respondent from Umuahia says women are not to be heard, that they should not be at the helms of affairs rather, but should rather be heard in entertainment (dancing, shaking of bums and smiling). Another KII respondent from Ohafia described the practice that relegates a woman to the kitchen such that when a woman goes out of the norm and tries to do something else, she is perceived as a wild and unsubmitive woman and then seen by men as a threat, as a gender-based harassment.

2. Unfavourable Scheduling of Party Meetings and Other Practices Political parties' dynamics also hinders women participation in Abia State politics (FGD Ohafia North Respondent) Late night meetings discourage them from participating (FGD Umuahia Respondent)

3. Cultural Practices: In our traditional setting, it is seen as a taboo for a woman to carry and give kola for titled men in local government and the rest of them. So, such things are inhibitions against women (Umuahia, KII Respondent).

4. Violence, intimidation and sexual abuse against women in politics.

They see women as not being strong enough to handle elective positions, hence, refusal to vote for them (FGD Umuahia Respondent).

Election is known to be characterized by violence and only few ladies can withstand the violent environment (KII Respondent).

5. Misconception of relationship between male and female politicians: For the married women, their husbands find it difficult to allow to go into politics because some men believe that most of the women that gets into politics, they get sexually abused by most men in power just to get to a higher position. Obasi, however debunked that misconception,

They see women that attend night meetings or travel far for political meetings as prostitutes. They believe they sell their bodies to get political offices. No personal experience, it is only based on the fact that husbands think their wives are loose. (FGD Umuahia Respondent)

It is not totally true. Most times, it is not that if you get into politics as a woman, you will start misbehaving, no. We have so many great women in politics that, till today, they still have their names intact. Then as a girl child, it is actually difficult for your parents to leave you to go into politics. Or maybe you have a man in your life that will allow you to go into politics. People will always go to tell the person things that could tarnish the lady's image (KII Respondent).

6. High Cost of Election Process/Financial Constraints.

Most women do not have the money to come and slog it out with the men who have godfathers here and there, who can sponsor them. You know that men can come together, even from another party to make sure that a woman doesn't come on board. They will sponsor, give in their money and all that (KII Respondent).

To a large extent there are some bills some women would not personally come up with to run election in Nigeria. I think that is also part of the disadvantages we are having here and it does not only affect the women, it also affects the youths because the cost of nomination and what have you spend through the process (KII Respondent).

7. Negative Religious Orientation: Nwagbara informed that, in terms of religious orientation, people would tell you that a woman going for late meetings in the nights shows that she is not being respectful to her husband.

So, that kind of preaching now cage women. It's as if you are now showing insubordination to your husband. But in the Bible, women led their countries like Dorcas, Deborah.

8. Traditional Inhibition due to Marriage: according to a KII respondent from Umuahia, Women have an inherent problem. For instance, I am born in Umuahia north, married in Ugwuani, when I come and said to contest for a position in Ugwuani, they denied me the opportunity that I'm not born in Ugwuani, it is only marriage and I'm coming to obstruct the positions of their sons and daughters. Then, when I come back to Umuahia north, where I was born, they said I have gotten married and that is a problem. So, women are on edge, just floating like oil. You'll go there, they will say no, you will come back, they will say no, you've gotten married, your share is no longer here. No matter the fact that the constitution has given us our rights but that right is being denied. You will accept our children as your own but you will not accept us. It happened to me; I'm talking from experience because I had wanted to contest for House of Assembly in 2011. I was coming back from my campaign trip, only for me to see the Council of Chiefs of Ugwuano in my father in-law's parlour discussing. What were they discussing? They were pouring libation that no woman married into Ugwuano land that will come and drag positions. My husband was so annoyed. He was like so you are against my wife who is contesting. They said it would be amended. What are we amending? So, those are the problems of a woman. She is neither here nor there.

9. Perception of Women as Having Weak Character: According to a KII respondent, women are considered by both male and female electorates as weak in character:

You know if you look at it historically, religiously as the case maybe also some men will likely tell you; c'mon, I can't be here and allow a woman represent me biblically I am the head of the family. And another thing is what is the history of the women that have also represented us at one point or the other. Many of them people said they were so arrogant and all that. It is a question of superiority of opinion. So, most times it may not necessarily be because of those opinions. So, our people hold it dear in this part of the world that if a woman or a man presents himself, they will likely choose the man because they believe he has a strong character. Our decisions are usually based on who has a stronger character than the other (Umuahia KII Respondent).

A story concerning one female contestant who contested in an election was shared.

One lady wanted to contest as an Honourable Member in the State House of Assembly. She was not well known in the community, so, they just wanted her to spend her money and they refused to vote for her". FGD Umuahia Respondent

What the statement above signifies is that, although it is essential to give women opportunity to participate in electioneering process, nevertheless, the woman must be qualified and must be well known at the grassroot and in the community over time, if not, the men will still carry the day.

10. Lack of Mentors and Supporters: *"Sometimes, women do not have people supporting them. We don't have sponsorship. We don't have mentors for women because they already don't believe in them" (KII Respondent).*

11. Absence of State Policy that supports women: *"We don't have a policy that includes women that probably said this percentage of participation in politics should come from the women (Ohafia, KII Respondent).*

12. Resistance by Jealous Husbands: *"You see a married woman wanting to contest, then her husband is kicking against it, thinking she wants to be greater than him" (Ohafia, KII Respondent).*

Do you think low participation of women in politics in Abia State has adverse effect in the political development of the State?

Responding to the questions, the informants were unanimous in their response, agreeing that low participation of women in Abia State has an adverse effect in the political development of the state. Their reasons were hinged on the fact that the few women who have occupied sensitive political positions in the state have stood out in their performances among their male counterparts.

If with the little number of women we have, their performance is this great, imagine what will happen if we have more women. (KII Respondent)

We have a lot of women that have shown consistency in holding unto good governance. We have Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala who is presently at the World Trade Centre, she was at the World Bank where she was brought from to become the Minister for Finance and the coordinating minister of the economy. Nigeria economy was blossoming and things were relatively fine. So, we can tap into some of those advantages. Especially because we have women that are equally highly endowed with knowledge and intelligence to give us good results. We have some women in the World Bank presently. In Abia, we have some women lawyer, we have some women piloting affairs of companies, industries and all that (KII Respondent).

They will, because the way women see things are not the way men see things. When women are occupying positions of authority, there should be improvement. We are having insecurity problems and these things stems from the homes. So, if women are given positions of authority, certain things will be curtailed. Remember what Akunyili did when they were covering Yara'dua's ill health. She was the one that spoke out, telling all Nigerians what was happening. So, women are like that (KII Respondent).

I believe that if women are given more opportunity in Abia state governance, they can handle the affairs effectively the way they do at home. Many women should be able to do better than so many of the men there (KII Respondent).

5.8 POLICIES AND INITIATIVES AIMED AT PROMOTING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Respondents asserted that there are currently no policies they believe have been put in place in Abia State to promote women's political and governance participation.

We don't really know, the one we know is the one that favours the girl child. The one that is behind her entitlement to her father's inheritance (FGD Ohafia North Respondent). There is none that I know. (FGD Umuahia Respondent)

In the same vein, according to the KII respondents, there are no specific policies in Abia State enabling or empowering women to participate in politics in Abia State known to the respondents. The only policy that was easily referred to by one of the respondents was the 35% Affirmative Act that was introduced by Goodluck Jonathan at the national level. Obasi and Uchenna categorically said there is no such policy while Joy Nwagbara explained that policies are just verbal.

We are now agitating on this constitution review that let it be entrenched in the constitution. That is the gender view that Nigeria women are taking to constitution review panel. That is our only hope, that if the bill sails through, we will have our rights on this. At least, women should be given a certain quota and that quota should be from the Senate and run down to the state and even to the local government (Umuahia KII Respondent).

So far, I've not heard of any because if there are policies like that then we shouldn't be talking about this in the first place. Probably there are policies but I have not heard of it so I can't say this policy has been in place to mandate women to participate (Ohafia KII Respondent).

I don't know of any policies, but I believe women should be empowered and encouraged to join politics even at an early stage from their secondary to tertiary institution should be able to participate and give your voice to the society no matter the stage you are (KII Respondent).

At the political party, women are not expected to pay nomination form to participate in election. Then there are other policies like the 35% gender symmetry. What it means is that in the National Assembly and State Assembly, you must have 35% women in every tenure or term. But you know in our country it's easier said than done. When they make some of these policies, they also fail to implement them. So, in terms of polices, the polices are there, it is only for you to take advantage and jump into it (KII Respondent).

Further inquiries were made if there should be a policy to keep some political positions during election and in governance to women, and almost all the respondents were in affirmative, stating that it will go a long way in improving women participation in politics and giving women financial power as well as ensuring that their voices are heard.

Regarding 'Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill' the respondents' understanding of its objectives was investigated and found to be good. The data analysis shows that 334 (34.9%) of the respondents said the bill seeks to protect women and girls from all forms of discrimination and abuses; 122 (12.7%) believed the bill seeks to bridge the gap existing between male and females politically; 118 (12.3%) said the bill seeks to empower women economically, while 3 (0.3%) said the bill is designed to protect vulnerable groups which include women. However, 93 (9.7%) were not aware of the bill (Figure 7).

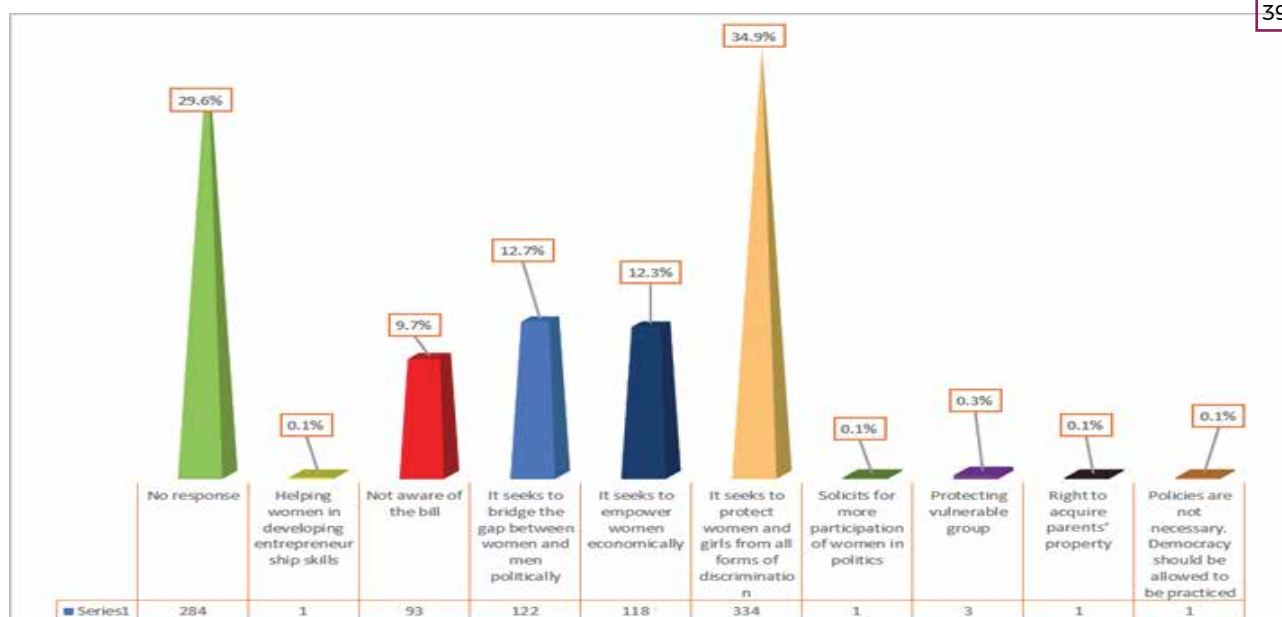


Figure 7: Assessing respondents understanding of the objectives of the Gender and equal opportunity bill

Sharing their perspectives on the 35% Affirmative Action, majority 485(50.6%) of the respondents said women in Abia State have not been given 35% in all elective positions at Local Government and State elections in line with the affirmative action demands, but 286(29.9%) of them were in the affirmative while 187(19.5%) could not be certain (Figure 8). However, 355(37.1%) of the respondents asserted that there is political will by the present government to fully implement the 35% affirmative action in Abia State's local and state elections and position allotments, although as 5r5r302(31.5%) doubted the government's readiness to implement such policy. 301(31.4) were neutral in the matter (Figure 8).

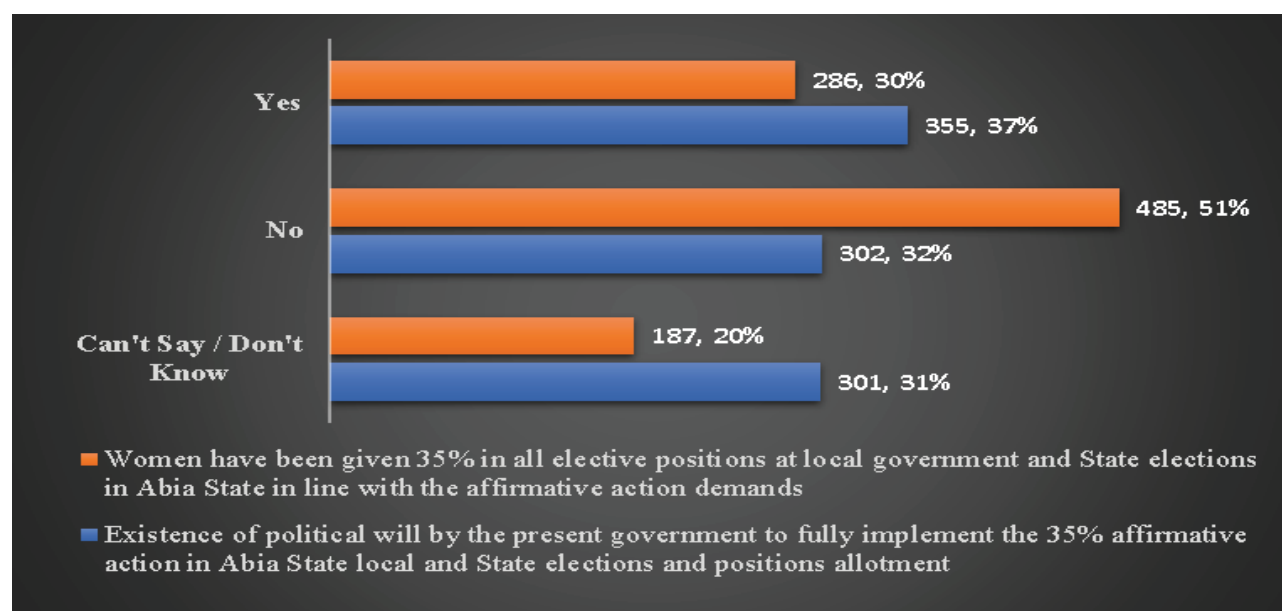


Figure 8: Responses on 35% Affirmative Action

Also, 400(41.8%) of the respondents believe that the implementation of the 35% affirmative action policy will be very effective (and 340(35.5%) saying it will be effective) in improving women's participation in politics in Abia State. Only 125(13%) of the respondents were pessimistic about it (Figure 9).

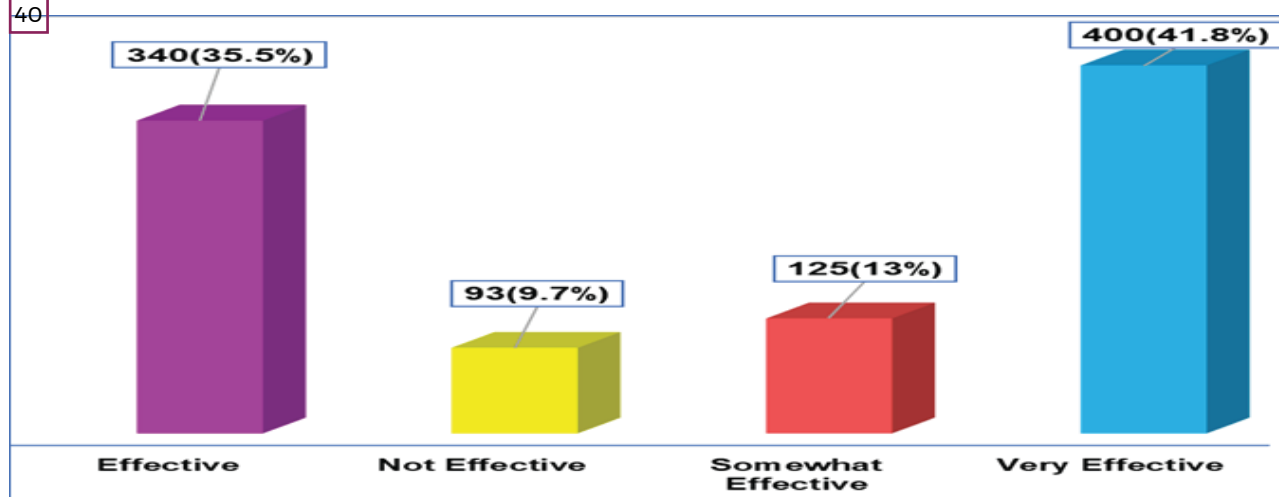


Figure 9: How effective will putting in place a law stipulating those positions be set aside for women in Abia State for Local and State elections

Providing examples of particular issues or policies affecting women that have been presented or advocated for by elected women in Abia State and their responses were as follows, 199(20.8%) of the respondents said the elected women advocated for gender equality and GBV as well as discrimination prevention, 85(8.5%) mentioned girl child education, 61(6.4%) mentioned maternal and child health, also 61(6.4%) mentioned women, widow and child's rights, empowerment of women and youths was the views of 60(6.3%) of the respondents, women political participation, 77(8%); poverty alleviation and job creation was mentioned by 47(4.9%), while 98(10.2%) said they did nothing in regards to issues and policies on issues affecting women during their tenure (Table 7).

Table 7: Examples of particular issues or policies affecting women that have been presented or advocated for by elected women in Abia State (N=958)

Variable (Q25)	Frequency	Percentage
Maternal and child health issues	61	6.4
Empowerments (financial etc.) and vocational training	60	6.3
Education of the girl child	85	8.9
GBV, Gender equality and discrimination	199	20.8
Political Participation of women	77	8.0
Abolishment of Godfatherism in politics to allow more women participate in politics	27	2.8
Implementation of the 35% Affirmative action policy	12	1.3
Women, widow and child's rights	61	6.4
Agricultural development and supports	5	0.5
Adequate funding for Ministry of women Affairs	2	0.2
Welfare & improvement in working condition (e.g. support for Work-Life balance)	16	1.7
Legal reforms & anti-discriminatory policies	20	2.1
Advocated for care of the elderly	3	0.3
Poverty alleviation& Job creation especially for women & youths)	47	4.9
Supported Fight Against Corruption	8	0.8
Breaking of cultural & religion norms and practices	27	2.8
Promotion of disability rights & inclusiveness	3	0.3
Environmental sustainability & climate change issues	2	0.2
Fought Against Male Chauvinism	25	2.6
Insecurity	22	2.3
Tax & pension reforms	2	0.2
Community development	16	1.7
Did nothing	98	10.2
Don't know/Can't say	66	6.9
No response	14	1.5
Total	958	100.0

5.9 SUGGESTIONS FOR PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

Suggesting what should be done to bring more women into the political leadership space in Abia State, 289(30.2%) of the respondents suggested more awareness to be created using different channels including the social media platforms; 172(18%) want political parties to admit more women into key positions in their political parties; 148(15.4%) suggested constitutional amendment which they said must include affirmative action demand; 72(7.5%) want more engagement and orientations to be conducted by women advocacy organisation on women political involvement issues; 41(4.3%) challenged women to express confidence by participating fully in the political processes; while 34(3.5%) demanded that political parties must avoid late night meeting and activities to save women from unnecessary criticism from the family and society (Table 8).

Table 8: What can be done to bring more women into the political leadership space in Abia State (N=958)

Variable (Q26)	Frequency	Percent
Constitution amendment to include affirmative action	148	15.4
More awareness campaigns, such as social media campaigns	289	30.2
Political parties admitting more women into key positions	172	18.0
Political parties/allies should avoid holding meetings at late hours of the night	34	3.5
Initiate and strengthen Support Networks and Mentorship	9	0.9
Government should address cultural and societal norms	5	0.5
The media should be balanced in their reporting/should avoid portraying female politicians in stereotypical and limiting ways in their content	12	1.3
Women Advocacy organizations should engage in orientation programmes	72	7.5
Women themselves should express confidence by participating fully	41	4.3
Perpetrators of political violence should be brought to provide a response on political violence	13	1.4
Non-governmental bodies should organize orientation programmes	26	2.7
Religious leaders should encourage female followers to participate in politics and governance	7	0.7
Traditional leaders should encourage female subjects in their communities to participate in politics and governance	10	1.0
Others (Provide adequate security)	6	0.6
No response	114	11.9
Total	958	100.0

To improve and strengthen women's participation in Abia State politics, 652(68.1%) of the respondents recommended that there should be a law stipulating a number of positions to be set aside for women in the State during Local and State elections. This recommendation was opposed by 306(31.9%) of the respondents (Figure 10).

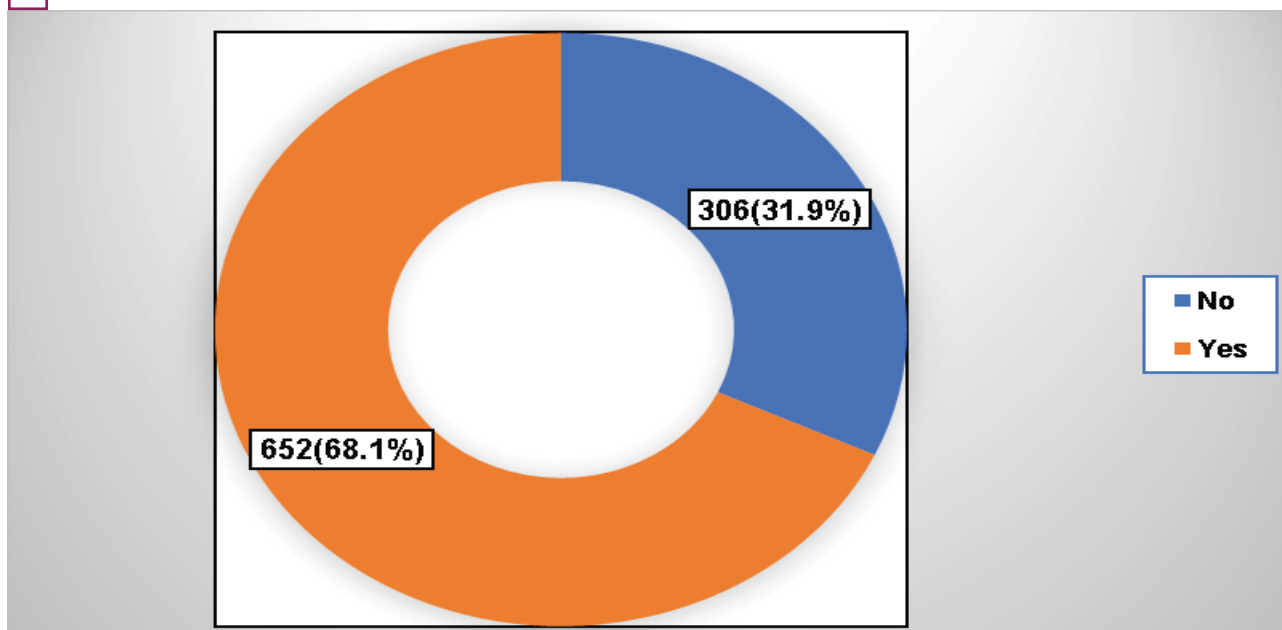


Figure 10: There should be a law stipulating certain positions be set aside for women in Abia State for Local and State elections.

In alignment with the recommendation, 620(64.7%) of the respondents said they were very likely (246(25.7%) were likely) to support new policies and initiatives that are aimed at promoting women's political participation in Abia State; 65(6.8%) were somewhat likely to support, and 27(2.8%) were not likely to support such policies and initiatives. This no-support position could be related to the statement by some that women occupying political position may do worse than their male counterpart citing examples somewhere else (Figure 11).

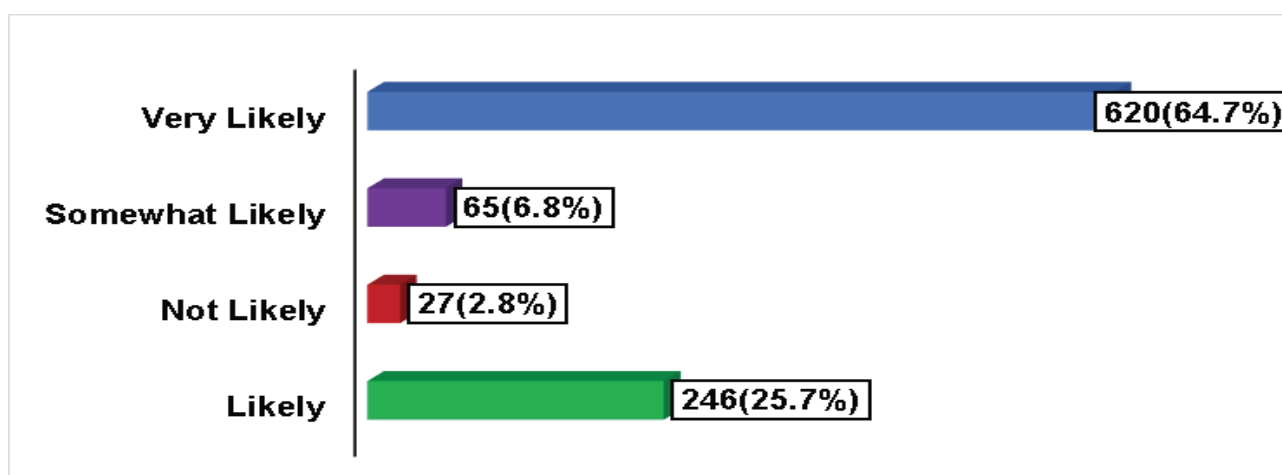


Figure 11: Respondents likely to support new policies and initiatives that are aimed at promoting women's political participation in Abia State.

Justifying their support for formulation of such new policies and initiatives, more of the respondents represented by 106 (11.1%) said it will lead to more empowerment and community development; 87 (9.1%) said it will promote good governance, transparency and accountability in the use of constituency funds; 83 (8.7%) believed it will promote gender equality and inclusiveness; 82 (8.6%) said it will lead to more women participating in politics as well as arouse their interest and consciousness. Others, 60 (6.3%) felt it will present a platform for women to advocate and support fellow women aspiring to be in politics (Table 9).

Table 9: Reason why respondents are likely to support new policies and initiatives that are aimed at promoting women's political participation in Abia State

Variable (28b)	N	%
Women make up approximately half of the population in Abia State, and should be part of decision-making processes.	33	3.4
Promoting women's political participation will help ensure that their interests and concerns are considered in policy-making	82	8.6
Diversity: To have diverse voices and experiences in political decision-making that lead to better and more inclusive policies	25	2.6
Empowerment & community development: By promoting women's political participation, women in Abia State will have the opportunity to take on leadership roles, build skills, and gain confidence in their abilities to influence change in their communities	106	11.1
Gender equality and inclusiveness: Promoting women's political participation is a crucial step towards achieving gender equality in Abia State. It is important to ensure that women have the same opportunities as men to participate fully in all areas of society, including politics	83	8.7
Good governance, transparency, accountability and constituency development: Research has shown that increasing women's political participation can lead to better governance, increased transparency, and more effective policies that benefit society as a whole	87	9.1
Supporting new policies and initiatives aimed at promoting women's political participation, Abia State can contribute to its overall development and progress	78	8.1
Supports the 35% affirmative action/level playing ground	24	2.5
Abia is one of the few states in Nigeria with highly educated female, thus political representation should also reflect that	32	3.3
Women more capable and competent than men	36	3.8
Assigning of a number of particular seats to women	13	1.4
More about the competency and character of the office holder	9	0.9
Men have failed, so let give women a chance/reduce male dominance	36	3.8
Social and cultural background not favouring women	45	4.7
Male Chauvinism	3	0.3
Not admitting women into key political positions	24	2.5
Will increase Unity and wealth	13	1.4
Women can still do worst/toxic	26	2.7
Need for change/improvement in governance	9	0.9
Will bring balance in politics/right thing to do	28	2.9
Will reduce women/girl child harassments/molestations/abuses	30	3.1
Awareness creation for participation and violence reduction	19	2.0
Women will have platform to advocate and support fellow women	60	6.3
No answer/response	15	1.6
Nothing/Don't know	42	4.4
Total	958	100

The KII and FGD respondents' suggestions or evidence-based recommendations they believe can go a long way in improving women's participation and engagement in politics and governance in Abia State are as follows:

i. Constitutionalizing the 35% Affirmative Act: Making the Act a constitutional provision will give more effect to it and enable more women to get more participatory in the Nigerian politics. *Whatever we are doing will be hinged on our constitution. As it is on our status book, let it be entrenched. The 35% we are talking about is long overdue. Some countries are now even agitating for 50/50 but Nigeria is still building on 35%. We are looking unto the quota. If they can give women a certain percentage from the head to down so that there will be a leverage. Because, if the constitution says there's a quota for women, it will now be included in our status book to go down to the parties. They will now fix it and amend their own bylaws that there will be a certain quota for women. Then it will run down to the states and the states have nothing else to do than to implement what is in the status book. This is our wish and it's the only way women can get up (KII Respondent).*

If we follow 60% to men and 40% to women participation, it will help women have financial support and security, this will promote participation. Women do come out but the policies on ground do not favor them (FGD Umuahia Respondent).

Yes, if women are given 35% out of 100% of the elective positions, it will go a long way to promote women's participation in politics in Abia State (FGD Umuahia Respondent).

Let political parties abolish late night meetings, give women security if they must attend late night political meetings. There is need for their husbands to be more understanding and support their wives' political ambitions. Some of the political parties' leaders say that it is not possible to cancel late night meetings because that is when they have enough time to discuss important issues (FGD Umuahia Respondent).

ii. Sensitization of Women to be Convinced and Confident of their Ability to Participate in Politics and Governance, and Against Negative Cultural and Social Norms.

Women must be sensitized; they must know they have a role to play in the society and they must be encouraged. Women should also start to believe in their fellow women. If you look at the statistics, women make up the highest number of voters, so why are they not also believing in their fellow women who present themselves for one position or the other. (Umuahia, KII Respondent).

There should be sensitizations against all these social and cultural norms that prevent women from going into politics. Once these few things and others are put into considerations, I think women will participate more (Ohafia, KII Respondent).

NGOs and donors should support women. Enlightenment programmes for women and the general population in churches, market places, work place, homes and everywhere to make them understand the importance of women political participation should be organised (FGD Ohafia North Respondent).

iii. Exemplary Leadership by Women in Political Positions: It is argued that if the few women who are occupying political positions use the positions to show their competencies and firm moral characters, both male and female electorates will begin to have more confidence and supports for women when they come out for elections into political offices. *The few people that are in politics should also be good examples because if you give a woman an opportunity and she excels, there is a tendency that people would say 'it could be done differently by a woman, let us give the woman a chance' (KII Respondent).*

iv. Conducting a Gender Audit in Political Parties:

I believe conducting a gender audit in a party can review opportunities for growth for women. If there's a gender audit in the party able to locate opportunities. It will help them to grow in politics (KII Respondent).

v. Mentorship: It is believed that if women are mentored, they will break out of the limitations to which they are currently succumbing.

There should be mentoring and a lot of trainings for women if you really want them to go into politics; send them to trainings, leadership programs and so on. I believe with all those things; women will want to do it better in politics (KII Respondent).

Mentorship is the first thing. There should be number of people willing to mentor these women that want to go into politics (KII Respondent).

The respondents also gave their opinions regarding government and INEC's conduct during and after elections. They recommended that the election umpires must be transparent and corruption-free, declaring the right result after elections. There should be no rigging people out to favour those that did not win. This they believe will be effective in bringing more women to participate in politics in Abia state.

Table 10: Barriers to the development of a policy or passage of a law to increase the number of women in political positions in Abia State (N=958)

Variable (29)	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of Finance and financial aid	165	17.2
Social norms and gender stereotype/bias	76	7.9
Political parties may favour male candidates	55	5.7
Male Chauvinism	65	6.8
Political Violence	88	9.2
Late Night meetings	36	3.8
Cultural and traditional norms:	58	6.1
Lack of political will	46	4.8
Resistance from existing power structures	21	2.2
Favouritism/Limited number of women in key positions	10	1.0
No policy or existing policies/laws poorly implemented	13	1.4
Lack of awareness and support from individuals and partners	28	2.9
High level of illiteracy among women	12	1.3
Law not specifying elective slot allotted to women	3	0.3
Gender discrimination and inequality	45	4.7
No transparency/accountability as well as corruption in the electoral system	22	2.3
Fewer women occupying political offices/low political participation	59	6.2
Lack of interest in politics/political apathy	28	2.9
Resistance to change	8	0.8
High level of poverty & financial disempower among women/girls	18	1.9
Bad performance by some women in governance	7	0.7
Family demands including pregnancy and resistance by husbands	15	1.6
The rigorous process of constitutional amendment	3	0.3
Low/lack of research on issues of women in politics & governance	4	0.4
Can't say/No idea/don't know	28	2.9
No barrier	19	2.0
No response	26	2.7
Total	958	100.0

Table 11: Strategy that can be put in place to increase the number of women participating / engaging in politics and governance in Abia State, Nigeria (N=958)

Variable 30.	Frequency	Percentage
A constitutional amendment should be done to include affirmative action	82	8.5
Women Advocacy organizations should engage in orientation programmes	114	11.9
Women themselves should express confidence by participating fully	110	11.5
Non-governmental bodies should fund women's political ambition financially	66	6.9
Political parties should admit more women into key positions	64	6.7
Religious leaders should encourage female followers to participate in politics and governance	73	7.7
The media should be balanced in their reporting/should avoid portraying female politicians in stereotypical and limiting ways in their content	48	5.0
Traditional leaders should encourage female subjects in their communities to participate in politics and governance	58	6.0
Perpetrators of political violence should be brought to respond to political violence	39	4.1
Encourage women to run for political office and hold political positions	41	4.3
Political parties/allies should avoid holding meetings at late hours of the night	48	5.0
Initiate and strengthen Support Networks and Mentorship	51	5.3
The government should address cultural and societal norms	52	5.4
Mobilize more women at the grassroots level to participate in politics	6	0.6
Sensitization of women at the grassroots level so they will have the confidence to vote and be voted for	8	0.8
Implementation of policies by the government including Affirmative Action policy	9	0.9
The women should help/support each other for the growth of our women	3	0.3
The government should stop gender discrimination and involve them in decision-making	2	0.2
Eradicate discrimination in the case of social vices	1	0.1
No strategy, therefore do not include them (women)	1	0.1
The guest for women participating in politics political programme/events should not be used as a political campaign tool that has become common during elections	1	0.1
The government should fund women's elections due to our present-day money politics	1	0.1
Self-trust amongst women	10	1.0
Total	958	100.0

6.0 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The findings on women's political participation and representation in local and state elections in Abia State offer critical insights into the challenges and impacts of gender dynamics in politics and governance in Abia State. Women's participation in politics is obstructed by financial, social, cultural, religious, economic, family and institutional barriers, which limit their access to political positions and decision-making processes. This underrepresentation negatively affects their inclusiveness in policy decisions and the overall development of Abia State. The analysis also shows that the poor representation negatively affects policy decisions related to women's rights, healthcare, gender equality, empowerment, political participation and women/girl child education. Therefore, this limited diversity in governance results in policies that usually play down critical issues for women. Certainly, greater female participation can lead to more equitable, accountable and responsive governance.

To improve women's political involvement, efforts must focus on addressing socio-economic barriers such as financial constraints, late-night meetings, insecurity and gender-based violence. Collaboration among political parties, civil society, and government institutions is essential for promoting gender equality and creating an environment that values women's contributions.

One of the key observations in this study is the continuous marginalization of women in the recent political climate in Abia State during the 2019 and 2023 election cycles where no woman has been elected into key positions in the State is worrisome. This situation leads to a governance structure that lacks diversity, which in turn affects the prioritization of issues related to women's rights, gender equity, healthcare, educational improvement, empowerment, women and children welfare. The study has shown that women have been excluded from the political sphere in Abia State in recent years.

In addition, the lack or unavailability of specific policies not clearly stating the implementation of the 35 per cent affirmative action tends to reflect a limited perspective. Also, available policies in the State often overlook issues that are critical to the female population. Furthermore, the decreased participation of women in governance has not fostered more equitable policies and a more responsive government. The lack of inclusive policies also results from lack of political will.

In effect, whereas the advancement in achieving gender equality in Abia State has been slow, nevertheless, continued advocacy and reforms as well as aggressive sensitization and awareness creation at all levels in the State can foster more inclusive participation in politics and governance, ultimately benefiting the state's overall development. This study of women's political participation in Abia State underscores significant barriers that limit their involvement in local and state politics and governance.

Efforts to therefore encourage women's political participation in Abia State need to concentrate on addressing socio-economic barriers that inhibit women's participation, such as financial constraints, gender-based violence, religious barriers, deeply rooted cultural norms, and political party dynamics. Political parties, families, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and Community and government institutions need to collaborate to implement reforms that promote gender equality, ensure the elimination of godfatherism and male chauvinism, support women interested in holding political office, and create an environment that values the contributions of women in the political landscape of Abia State.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

To support some of the recommendations already proffered by participants in the research, this study recommends the following:

1. The government needs to specifically introduce and enforce legal frameworks as well as support constitutional amendments that mandate gender quotas (35 per cent or more) in local and state elections to be given to women, as this will ensure that a certain number of elected positions and appointment are given to women during elections.
2. There is a need for political parties to review their meeting time to allow more women to participate.
3. The political parties can also intentionally and voluntarily adopt internal quotas, that is, reserving specific percentages of their leadership positions and candidate slots for women.
4. Political parties should sustain the giving out of forms free of charge to female participant to encourage their involvement since financial power is one of the challenges hindering women's participation in Abia State politics
5. The society and families should stop labelling female politicians negatively and avoid subjecting them to unconstructive criticisms.
6. All forms of training, workshops and seminars on vital topics to prepare women for leadership roles, that will assist them in overcoming potential challenges they are likely to face during the political process needs to be organized by NGOs, women's groups, and government agencies for women and community periodically
7. Civil society organizations and communities need to increase advocacy activities for gender equality in political participation, using grassroots mobilization and public awareness campaigns to fight norms and promote women's leadership.
8. Political parties should take pragmatic steps to reform internal party structures to enhance gender inclusion and create enabling environments that allow women to thrive and fully participate in the decision-making processes.
9. Government, donor organizations, families, private sectors, partners and even communities need to make funds available or subsidize cost of forms for their female candidates.

10. There is need for schools, religious institutions, work place, market and community leaders to set a political forum to engage in dialogues that speaks on the benefits of women's participating in politics, and governance, which are geared towards fostering a culture of inclusivity for women of all ages.
11. Policies that protect female politicians from intimidation, harassment, criticism, body shaming, violence, and discrimination should be strictly implemented to increase female politicians' confidence in the electoral process and activities
12. Females should support their fellow females who are in politics or aspiring to go into politics to fully participate in voting and being voted for.
13. There is a need to build a stronger political system than building strong political persons. Presently, there are more strongmen and weak institutions, which has bred godfatherism and corruption in the electoral system.
14. Dialogues between women's groups and traditional authorities, religious leaders and community leaders need to be initiated to discuss cultural reforms that support gender equity in political leadership at all levels.
15. Mentorship programmes should be taken seriously to reproduce more female politicians in Abia State.

8.0 CONCLUSION

The objective of this research study is to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics surrounding the performance of women in local government areas and state elections in Abia State. The aim of this effort is to inform strategies to enhance women's representation and participation in governance, especially at the local and state level.

The findings of this study should not only inform processes but policies and actions of all stakeholders.

Furthermore, findings and recommendations from the research work would form the foundation for the activities and advocacy efforts throughout the lifespan of the Safe Spaces for Women and Girls project.

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