

## Impact of Women Under-representation in Nasarawa State House of Assembly, Nigeria

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### Abstract

Political representation and participation involve forming political associations, voting, participating in decision-making, holding public office, and engaging in other political activities. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), with headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, was founded in 1889 (Turner, B., 2011), promotes equal representation as a fundamental right of women that should be exercised under conditions of freedom, equity, transparency, and accountability, with due regard for the diversity of opinions and the polity's interests. However, in Nasarawa State, women were visibly absent in the parliament all through the four Nigerian republics (1963–1966, 1979–1983, 1992–1993, and 1999–date). This qualitative, in-depth study examines the impact of women's under-representation in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly (NSHA) in the fourth Nigerian republic. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 13 females and 17 males who are experts in related fields of politics, and academia; for the study. There are three major findings: (i) the implications of the absence of women in the legislatures of the NSHA; (ii) the absence of socio-economic developmental policies in the NSHA, and (iii) insufficient information and candidate popularity among women and its implications for women's representation in the NSHA. The study is a novelty compared to previous research on the impact of women's under-representation in the NSHA because it is an in-depth exploration of the impact of women under-representation in one of the most badly affected states in Nigeria; specifically, in the NSHA.

**Keywords:** Political Representation, Women's Under-Representation, Fundamental Rights, Political Associations, Nasarawa State Legislature.

### Introduction

Forming political associations, voting, participating in decision-making, holding public office, and engaging in other political activities are all examples of representation and

participation (Milbrath, 1981; Agbalajobi, 2010; Krook & Norris, 2014). The idea of equal representation serves as both a target and an ideal, and it is connected to democracy itself. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (Warner, 1998; Beetham (Ed.), 2006), equal representation is a fundamental right of citizenship that should be exercised under conditions of freedom, equity, transparency, and accountability, with proper regard for the diversity of viewpoints and the interests of the polity.

Therefore, it follows that all adult citizens have the right to vote and be voted for and that no group, including racial, gender, or ethnic minorities, should ever experience prejudice in the democratic system. Consequently, for a parliament to be "representative," it must be a scaled-down version or miniature of society (Matlosa, 2005; Tremblay & Anne, 2013). Strong parliaments, therefore, promote and ensure the entire public's engagement in political processes. To eliminate a representation gap, it has been suggested that "women are equal citizens and therefore should share, equally with men, in public decision-making positions" (Matlosa, 2005; Tremblay, 2013). The number of women in parliament is therefore regarded as a sign of the effectiveness of a state's political representation. Electoral procedures have an impact on the number of women in parliaments. Tremblay and Matlosa also stated that parliaments chosen using a plurality or majority system have proportionally twice as many women as legislative assemblies that are disallowed in a parliamentary representation (PR) system.

Taking into account how women running for office may affect women's desire for political representation, women's knowledge about women's participation in politics is likely to encourage women's involvement in politics. Therefore, it is expected that most female candidates should act as role models who inspire other women to participate in politics. The results of political empowerment and women's expressed desire for political involvement should rise along with the proportion of women running for office. Women are not more likely to choose to get involved in politics or feel more external effectiveness when they are personally represented by womenfolk in Congress. The results of political empowerment and women's expressed desire for political involvement should rise along with the proportion of women running for office. However, a study has shown that, if there are two candidates, a male, and a female, vying for a political position, women are just as likely to say they will vote for the male candidate as against their female counterparts. (Lawless, 2008; Dolan, 2014; Atkeson & Carrillo, 2007; Broockman, 2014).

The Nasarawa State House of Assembly had no women elected in 1999, 2003, 2011, and 2015, violating the 1995 Beijing Affirmative Platform and 2000 National Policy on Women. (Egwu, 2015; Ndung & Machue, 2022). Gender stereotypes, cultural beliefs, political climate, financial resources, electoral violence, party structures, traditional beliefs, negative perceptions of women in politics, anti-egalitarian practices, and religion have influenced Nasarawa State's low female legislative representation since the Fourth Republic in 1999. (Agishi, 2014; Ndung & Machue, 2022).

The 1995 Beijing Affirmative Platform for Action and 2000 National Policy on Women proposed 30% and 35%, respectively (Egwu, 2015). Thus, if women are not represented in politics in Nigeria, their rights and liberties may be disregarded. Involve women in policymaking. Political participation is "freedom of expression, association, the right to the free flow of communication, the right to influence the decision-making process, and the right to social justice, health services, better working conditions, and franchise opportunity," according to (Okolie, 2004).

Since 1999, gender stereotypes, cultural and religious beliefs, an unfavourable political climate, a lack of financial resources, electoral violence, restrictive party structures and procedures, socio-cultural factors like traditional beliefs, a negative perception of women in politics, anti-egalitarian practices, and religion have kept Nasarawa State's female legislative representation low. Violence, low self-esteem, and political indifference Willis & Chome (2014) are other issues.

The lack of democratic leadership and collaborative dispute resolution in Nasarawa State contributes to women's underrepresentation. Women's leadership and latent potential are being recognized (Tatli et al., 2013). Due to women's underrepresentation in parliaments, the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Bill, the Affirmative Action (Equal Opportunity for Women) Bill, the Women and Girls Advancement Bill, the National Council for Widows, Dependent Children, and Orphans (Establishment, Special Provisions, etc.), and the National Centre for Women's Development were introduced in 2012. The Rules and Business Committee of the House of Representatives, Nigeria, 2019 reported that this measure has not been enacted due to a lack of sponsors. The "Ombatse Cult" ambush and murder of Nasarawa widows was peacefully condemned in May 2014 (Dan-Azumi & Asan, 2021).

Based on these assumptions, the researcher examines the impact of women's underrepresentation in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly, focusing on the lack of women's representation in the NSHA. The internal party democracy of the PDP influenced women's representation in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly through the activities that took place under the PDP candidate selection process, which directly impacted the results of the primary elections within the PDP.

### **Literature Review**

The current study reviewed relevant literature, in order to generate the scholarly work of previous researchers on the effects of women's underrepresentation in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly. The purpose of conceptual clarification is to identify the gap past researchers left behind, which served as the foundation for the current study. It could be comprehended from past studies that were able to explain why there has been a persistent decline in the numerical strength of women's membership representation in the Nigerian States' House of Assembly during the fourth republic political and democratic dispensation from 1999–2015 (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010; Agbalajobi, 2010; Olufade, 2013; Mohammed, 2013; Ekundayo & Ama, 2014; Premium Times, 2017; Fayomi et al., 2022).

Scholars indicated the continued decline of women's participation in Nigeria's legislative house and the eventual absence of women's representation as illustrated by the Nasarawa State House of Assembly have been partly discussed by (Ake et al., 2019; Nweke, 2006; Nwodo, 2010; Metuh, 2010; Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011; Omenma et al., 2016; Ibeanu, 2013; Katsina, 2016; Kelly, 2019). The reason why there is a low number of women who declared interests and were chosen as candidates from various political parties is due to the nature of the internal democratic practice, which affects women candidates who end up not being selected for the election. Another reason, according to them, is women's limited access to significant financial resources, coupled with inequality, inequity, violence against women, and godfatherism, which are some of the practical instances of internal party democracy that affect women's representation.

A study has shown that Nigeria's biggest issue is women's underrepresentation Adeyemi et al (2006), despite the fact that several researchers suggest that involving women immediately yields benefits Nwoye (2007), as world leaders have included many powerful

women in leadership (Akunyili, 2006). Though the country is one of several emerging democracies that are working to remove social barriers that prevent women from leading, participating, or representing themselves in politics (Akunyili, 2006), Women in Nigeria, like those in other emerging democracies, lack the tools needed to become public leaders. The country is impoverished and has "deepening inequality arising from imperial relations, differentiated histories, and geographies of colonialism, prolonged military dictatorship, and authoritarian civilian rule" (Pereira, 2009, pp. 263-264). Access to resources is limited, and the balance of power in the country determines which group—based on gender, class, ethnicity, religion, and age—is excluded or marginalized (Pereira, 2009). Since no one doubts that women can develop in Nigeria, researchers agree that women should be included in national politics (Ifedili & Ifedili, 2009).

Women's participation in Nigeria's growth is undervalued in decision-making roles. In 1995, Nigerian women participated in the International Conference on Women in Beijing, China, highlighting the importance of women. That Beijing conference declared that "women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, were fundamental for the advancement of equality, development, and peace." Nigeria signed the international instruments and laws recommending a 30% threshold for women in decision-making roles by 2000 after the 1995 conference. However, the Nigerian government has faced various challenges in achieving the benchmark (Ifedili & Ifedili, 2009). The government's failure to enshrine equal opportunity in law, women's unwillingness to aspire, men's opposition to women's advancement, intolerable cultural traditions that need to be changed, traditionalists who believe women should not be educated, and women fighting each other were some of those issues. Traditional cultural ideas make Nigeria a patriarchal country, which hinders women's representation. Social conventions, society, and religion discriminate against women. Ifedili and Ifedili (2009) claimed that researchers like Winful (2001) stressed the need to eliminate all factors that have and still work against women's involvement in decision-making roles, and a study has said they are marginalized.

It is worth noting that some Nigerian women who scaled the ladder to leadership were opposed by men. For instance, in 1999, Lagos State's first female deputy governor complained about being marginalized in tasks and responsibilities (Ifedili & Ifedili, 2009). The sole female Speaker of the House of Assembly in Benue State was pushed to quit by the men because she was battling corruption, according to Ifedili & Ifedili. Patricia Etteh was Nigeria's first female House Speaker who was alleged, like other state-level women, that her male colleagues urged her to retire (Ifedili & Ifedili, 2009). Though some National Assembly and House of Representatives senators were women, Nigeria has not met the 1995 Beijing 30% goal for women in decision-making roles. Although such events underscore the importance of Nigerian women, especially in politics, Ifedili and Ifedili (2009) argue that much remains to be done. Nigeria's political administration must include more women, particularly in the House of Representatives. Consequently, a study of the impacts of women's underrepresentation in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly in Nigeria has become imperative, which is the objective of this study. Secondly, the impact consequently results in the absence of women in NSHA, thirdly, there are ineffective policies against women in NSHA due to their absence in the assembly.

**Conceptualizing the Impact of Women Under-representation**

The low representation of women in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly has resulted in a lack of women's empowerment and insecurity, which is detrimental to gender political equality, ideal democracy, and the national economy's developmental strategies. The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD) acknowledges that this low representation contributes to biased policies aimed at protecting and advancing women's rights. Issues such as violence against women, poverty, unemployment, women's education, and gender equality integration remain severe challenges in Nigeria. The lack of women's representation in the legislative organ of government has led to inadequate enforcement of policies aimed at women's welfare, leading to rampant issues like sexual harassment, rape, divorce, and domestic violence. This has also led to a decline in credible, transparent, free, and fair candidate selection within the party.

Bako, Syed, and ERIBO opined that another crucial problem is that the legislature's policies and programmes are unfavourable to women because women are unable to defend those policies due to their absence in the legislative houses across the country (Bako & Syed, 2018; ERIBO, 2020). When there are no women who represent the state, there is no official platform to voice out and discuss the plights that women face. Therefore, there is a lack of balance of ideas on policies and programmes in the legislature, as men alone make all decisions. Consequently, because of the imbalanced representation between men and women in the house assemblies, women's rights are overlooked and, in some cases, ignored. It can be said that women's oppression, the imposition of candidates on women, the loss of an active voice on women's equality with men, and the injustice and lack of equity in decision-making in the legislature are examples of how women's rights are not protected (Cassola et al., 2014; Wood, 2019).

The absence of women's representation indicates that the problem of women's representation in Nasarawa State is unique and therefore requires an academic study to understand it (Aleyomi, 2013; Ikeanyibe, 2014; & Tambari, 2017). Although these studies revealed a lot about women's underrepresentation in state assemblies in Nigeria and other African nations, they neglected the impact of women's underrepresentation in the NSHA, necessitating the need for the current study. Secondly, there is an absence of socio-economic developmental policies against women in NSHA. Thirdly, women's input is excluded in the legislative house of the Nasarawa State House of Assembly.

**Research Methodology**

The researcher used a qualitative approach to investigate the impact of women's underrepresentation in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly (1999–2015). Creswell (2003) stated that qualitative research can be used to investigate and understand the significance that individuals or groups place on a social or human situation. The qualitative approach is chosen for this study because it is adaptable and appropriate, allowing the researcher to explore many interpretations of the data that were appropriate for addressing the study issues as they relate to the present issue of the impact of women's underrepresentation in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly under study. According to the study being conducted, qualitative research is rich in its descriptions and has helped to produce quality and detailed information obtained through the data collected, which is well-detailed and has offered a greater insight into the specific matter under study. It has also assisted the present researcher and the audience readers of this work in understanding not only the emotions and thoughts

of the chosen informants but also the causes of their actions, as per the rich findings generated from the qualitative study.

The researcher employed the single case study because it provided an opportunity for an in-depth exploration of the event (Creswell, 2003). The researcher's methodical approach has resulted in the achievement of the research objective. Secondly, the case study method gives a better understanding of the impact of women's under-representation in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly. The researcher conducted in-depth, face-to-face interviews with key informants. Relevant strategies, processes, or techniques were used by the researcher to rigorously explain the impact of women's underrepresentation in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly.

In this study, an in-depth interview was vital because it drew out information from the informants on internal party democracy within the PDP candidate selection process and its impact on women's representation. The selection of the informants was appropriate because most of them were people who had the knowledge or had gone through primary elections and party selections. The sampling technique used for the selection of the informants for the study is purposive sampling, which gave the researchers the freedom to select experienced and knowledgeable individuals or groups of individuals in the area of the phenomenon in question. A total of thirty (30) informants were selected in the process of conducting the in-depth face-to-face interview at a point where saturation was attained and the information emerging from informants became a replica of what had been given by others. And the data collected was validated through triangulation, member checking, deep involvement in data collection, peer examination, and validation of transcribed hard copy data by all the informants that were interviewed. The data were analysed with the aid of a thematic analytical tool.

## **Findings**

Based on a thematic analysis of the data, 3 major themes were identified such as (i) the implications of the absence of women in the legislatures of the Nasarawa State House of Assembly (NSHA); (ii) the implications of the absence of socio-economic developmental policies in the NSHA, and (iii) insufficient information and candidate popularity among women and its implications for women's representation in the NSHA

### **(1) The implications of the absence of women in the legislatures of the Nasarawa State House of Assembly (NSHA)**

Under theme 1 (The implications of the absence of women in the legislatures of the Nasarawa State House of Assembly (NSHA), I have identified 2 subthemes which are a) The Absence of Women Representation and Ineffective Policies towards Women in Nasarawa State House of Assembly. b) The exclusion of Women's input in Legislation and its implications for the Nasarawa State Assembly.

This study reveals that there are no women in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly, posing potential consequences for Nigeria's democracy. In-depth interviews reveal numerous consequences of the absence of women in the Legislative Assembly.

Informants expressed concerns about the absence of women legislators in the Nasarawa State legislative assembly, citing the lack of female input in policy handling and debate. They argued that a better understanding of women's issues would make all issues more effective, leading to poorly implemented laws and regulations. The absence of women in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly is an aberration against women's fundamental

rights to political participation, as outlined by the United Nations General Assembly on CEDAW in 1979 (Asiedu et al., 2018). Equally, when women are involved in decision-making, it is not only a democratic benefit, but it also bends and possibly breaks overall male dominance in democratic politics (Hassim, 2006). The absence of women in parliament, like in Nasarawa State, may hinder the passage of laws on domestic violence, divorce, rape, and sexual harassment. This is in contrast to a study by Asiedu, Gaekwad-Babulal, and Malokele (2018) that found nations with a higher percentage of women are more likely to pass laws that protect victims of domestic violence, divorce, rape, and sexual harassment. The study was carried out using data generated from four sample groups of 159: 111 outside Sub-Saharan Africa, 43 in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 48 African countries.

In Nigeria, poorly formulated policies affecting women's rights are evident due to a lack of women's representation. Informants E5, E6, and C1 believe that the Nasarawa State House of Assembly has limited policies on women's affairs, with men making decisions. This results in a lack of favourable policies that advance and protect women's rights. Some of the informants whose views were captured from the interview interaction included informant E5, who pointed out that

*Ok, if the women are not fully represented, they cannot bring out policies that befit, that favour the women that make the women look better and have a better life in the system.*

Informant E6 also asserts that

*Ok, as I said, if we have more women after being given a level playing field, they could bring in policies like free education for women and compulsory education for women, but when they are not represented, this cannot come into play.*

Informant C1 also stated and said

*As I said earlier, there have not been women in the house, so because of their absence, they can't create or defend policies that have to do with women, so they can't take care of themselves because they have not been there.*

Informant E3 said Some policies will alter because of women. Some legislation will protect women.

The more women we have in the State House of Assembly, the better the policies will be for women.

The present study's findings emphasize the fact that the presence of women enhances the enactment of laws that promote women's affairs. This is in agreement with the UN President, who declared that having more women in parliament than men ensure radical anti-discrimination reform laws (Newton, 2019).

#### **(a) The Absence of Women Representation and Ineffective Policies towards Women in Nasarawa State House of Assembly**

It was discovered that policies related to women's affairs in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly are virtually absent, as women legislators are not available to support issues affecting women because most of the policy formulators are men. Therefore, women suffer from policies that would have helped address women's problems. The informants who contributed to this argument's weight have informed it.

Informant C1 testified that

*As I said earlier, there have not been women in the House, so because of their absence, they can't create or defend policies that have to do with women, so they can't take care of themselves because they have not been there.*

Informant C4 and Informant F1 argue that women's representation in the state can reduce trafficking in the National House of Assembly. Women are more aware of their needs and drive policies that benefit them. This representation encourages them to join the PDP party, canvass for political positions, and lobby for positions, ultimately supporting their efforts.

Again, informant F1, in his submission, said:

*Yes, when we have women who are representatives in their different constituencies, they will be able to formulate policies that will encourage other women to get involved. Those are policies for girl-child education. If you look at how the trend of the event is going in Nasarawa State and even in Nigeria as a whole, women have been side-lined. Educationally, wise women have been drawn to the background. Women will be able to help their fellow women. Look at the issue of health—do you know that women are suffering a lot? Pre-natal, anti-natal, and the rest of the processes You know that health is wealth. When women are there, they can address the issue properly because they have passed through one or two stages. But as men, what do we know about issues affecting women? We will just come to the Chamber of the House and debate on one or two policies that are favourable to women, and other aspects of women's issues will be ignored, so we need women in the House.*

Informant F1, in his further argument, adds:

*When we include women in the decision-making process, we have more policies. And these policies are nation-building policies.*

Surprisingly, informants F1 and E2 believe that women should be given more opportunities to represent the people, as it benefits not only women and children but the nation as a whole. This will improve the status of women, improve policies and programs affecting their existence, and serve as a place of development for them and the environment. Men tend to focus on what is best for men, but women can bring issues that affect them and find solutions for themselves. By providing more opportunities for women to represent the people, they can contribute to the nation's development and growth.

The informants argue that the absence of women in the state House of Assembly leads to weak and ineffective policies and programs affecting women's roles and rights. The presence of women in the House would advance the enactment of laws on women and child trafficking, improve women's representation, and implement additional benefits like free education for girls. However, women's affairs suffer in a society where men are predominantly the makers of laws, and the absence of a single woman in a legislative house may pose a significant threat to women's interests.

#### **(b) The Exclusion of Women's Input in Legislation and Its Implications for the Nasarawa State Assembly**

It has been revealed from the findings of the present study that the absence of women in the Nasarawa State Assembly has another implication. When women are not part of the



Assembly, they are excluded from democracy, and their rights are denied. The implication of this is that it infringes on the fundamental human rights of women. After all, women's participation is a fundamental human right, just as political participation is a fundamental human right that guarantees citizens' rights to participate directly or through representatives in the affairs of the public government (Bunch, 1990; Thomas & Welch, 2001). Therefore, as women are not represented in the state assembly in Nasarawa State, their fundamental rights are infringed upon. What the masses want is likely missing from the state assembly, and that is exactly the main contention of the informants regarding the absence of women in the assembly, which has its roots in candidate selection.

Informant B4 protested that the calibre of candidates produced during the general election is mostly weak candidates who do not truly represent the people simply because delegates at the party level voted for the wrong people from the PDP candidate selection. As far as the informant is concerned, it is the wrong candidates that are voted into power.

*At times, when the selection is being made based on what the masses want, most of those going through the selection process select the wrong candidates that are not the masses' choice. This is the simple reason why, in the general elections, you will see the wrong candidate win. Delegates will go against the wishes of the masses.*

Similarly, informant A3 also admitted that the main problem that led to the absence of women in Nasarawa State House emanated from the selection process that usually takes place at the party level. According to the informant, delegates to the political parties are the ones that are wrongly electing people into political posts, which are done based on sentiments against women.

*This is the simple reason why, in the general elections, you will see the wrong candidate win. Delegates will go against the wishes of the masses.*

The Nasarawa State Legislative Assembly's exclusion of women due to gender discrimination could have dangerous political, social, and economic implications for the public good. This exclusion promotes unequal power-sharing between women and men, leading to unfair political processes and social policies. Asiedu, Branstette, and Gaekwad-Babula (2018) emphasize the need for a more inclusive and equitable political system.

## **2. The implications of the absence of socio-economic developmental policies in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly**

Under theme 2 (The implications of the absence of socio-economic developmental policies in the **Nasarawa State House of Assembly**), I have identified 2 subthemes which are a) **The Implications of the Absence of Women in the Nasarawa Parliament on Poverty, Low Levels of Education, and Poor Financial Resources.** b) **Lack of welfare to boost women's political capacity in the PDP candidate selection process and implications for women's representation in the Nasarawa Parliament.**

Socio-economic development is a significant global concern, impacting the quality and standard of living in countries worldwide. Improved societies can reduce poverty, while low socio-economically developed countries have high poverty rates, high mortality rates, and low per-capita income. Therefore, the importance of socio-economic development cannot be underestimated.

Legislative and social development is significantly influenced by gender parity in parliament. Rwanda's President called for women to contest elections before parliamentary

elections in 2003, stating that increasing women's representation in politics would improve family economic, social, and political conditions and society as a whole. Consequently, women won 48% of the total seats in the Rwandan lower house of parliament, thereby elevating Rwanda to the first list of women's representations in the world, far above the 30% United Nations Declaration made in Beijing over two decades ago (Zaborszky, 2017).

*Rwandan society has seen a shift in women's roles, from caring for children and households to inspiring future generations to be ambitious and follow in their mother's footsteps. These women serve as role models for girls and children, raising living standards and community standards. As women become more active in decision-making positions, public opinion shifts, as they are now considered capable of leading in society. This positive impact on children, particularly girls, is expected to continue (Member of Parliament Evariste Kalisa, interview, Spring 2006, translated from French; (Hogg, 2009).*

Based on the testimonies of some of the Rwandan male parliamentarians, it is no longer doubtful that women in parliament perform excellently in socio-economic development. The situation in the Nasarawa State Legislative House of Assembly calls for a thorough investigation because woman legislators are adjudged to be among the best in policymaking. This is coupled with the fact that, while in places like the United States of America, a state with the fewest women parliamentarians, the percentage in Mississippi, however, was 13.8% as of July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019 out of the fifty states (Wiener, 2021). All other states within the same period had at least 14% of women running for office. In Nigeria, Nasarawa State does not even have one female representative in the parliament. In this regard, we proceed to discuss and analyse the implications of the absence of women parliamentarians in Nasarawa State on the formulation of policies on socio-economic development.

#### **(a) The Implications of the Absence of Women in the Nasarawa Parliament on Poverty, Low Levels of Education, and Poor Financial Resources**

Women's representation in parliament has not only been seen as a veritable tool for the formulation of policies that advance and protect the rights of women but has also helped in making policies for children and the family unit. Also, drawing a typical sample from the performance of women in the Rwandan Parliament, it is believed that women in parliament will improve the living standards of the community in general (Member of Parliament Evariste Kalisa, interview, Spring 2006, translated from French) (van & Elings, 2014). Reversely, the exclusion of women from politics poses a threat to power relations and consequently undermines regard for women's needs and their interest in policymaking (Asiedu et al., 2018). Similarly, it has been discovered by the present study that the absence of female legislators in Nasarawa State has resulted in poverty, a low level of education, and poor financial resources among women and Nigeria. In support of this argument, informants C6 and C3 exclaimed that the main implication associated with the absence of women in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly is the inability of women to engage in the formulation of policies that would have helped women be better placed in society. This is because women are generally financially poor compared to men, coupled with their lack of education. The informant said such developments also continued to be influenced by culture and religion, while the implication also extended to a lack of financial resources. This is exactly how informant C6 puts it

*Ah, poverty, lack of education, and religion and culture. As I said earlier, religion can be one, then maybe the tradition, the culture, or the background, and you go a little bit to poverty, lack of funds and finances, and possibly lack of education.*

On the part of informant C3, he started by itemizing the implications, saying *Eh, we have religious issues; religious issues are one of the attributes. Then there is the aspect of poverty; you know, some of them are not well equipped, so if one's money is not available, it affects the internal democracy. It goes a long way toward affecting candidates. In most cases, people who have the competency to do it are left out because of poverty. Or money and influence, as the case may be. Secondly, we have poverty, where they don't have the finances to run some courses; which affects them.*

This subtheme emerged from the interviews with the informants regarding the absence of women in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly, which has an important link to poverty, poor education, and a lack of resources. These characteristics continue to affect women's representation in politics, as they continue to pose a threat to a society where there is a limited number of women to formulate policies against it in parliament.

The findings also show that the lack of women's representation resulted in the absence of women's representation in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly, ineffective policies towards women, the absence of socio-economic developmental policies, and the exclusion of women's input in legislation.

#### **(b) Lack of welfare to boost women's political capacity in the PDP candidate selection process and implications for women's representation in the Nasarawa Parliament**

The study reveals that the lack of welfare for women in the PDP candidate selection process hinders their participation and contestation. Informants C6 and E4 link the lack of women legislators in the state parliament to restricted welfare for women, which would have been provided if there were women in the state parliament. This lack of welfare is a major obstacle to women's capacity to participate and secure electoral victory in the PDP candidate selection process. Hence, policies in this regard could not be defended, which explains why women are suffering.

Informants C6 and E4 mentioned that there are no women in the House of Assembly to defend policies and create laws for women's welfare. If there are women representing, they will stand up for their fellow women and create policies that support women's participation in politics and ensure their welfare.

According to informant E6, women cannot have a better life when they are not well represented. The informant further argued that women would have better-protected welfare when they were well-represented in parliament.

*Ok, if women are not fully represented, they cannot bring out policies that are befitting, that favour women, and that make women look better and have a better life in the system.*

Informants reveal low women's welfare, leading to a lack of motivation to participate in candidate selection and representation in the Nasarawa State Parliament. This worsens women's situation and empowers them for political participation and representation in the House of Assembly. A recommendation to bridge the gap between women and policies to

increase political literacy is crucial for enhancing women's political participation and representation in the state House of Assembly.

**(3) Insufficient information and candidate popularity among women and its implications for women's representation in the Nasarawa State Parliament**

Under theme 3 (Insufficient information and candidate popularity among women and its implications for women's representation in the Nasarawa State Parliament), I have identified 2 subthemes which are a) Limited Political Literacy in the PDP Candidate Selection and the Implication for Women's Representations in Nasarawa State Parliament. b) Candidate's Popularity in the PDP Selection Process and Its Implication on Women Representation in Nasarawa State Parliament

There are some significant factors, according to informants, that are responsible for women continued low political participation and their inability to secure victory in the election of candidates' selection under the People's Democratic Party (PDP). These are women's ignorance of political education and existing rules, as well as the level of candidate popularity. The informants argue that these factors have consequentially led to the absence of women representation in the Nasarawa State Parliament.

**(a) Limited Political Literacy in the PDP Candidate Selection and the Implication for Women Representations in Nasarawa State Parliament**

Some of the informants had observed that one of the most serious challenges being experienced by women in securing winning votes in the PDP candidate election lies in their poor political education regarding certain relevant political developments within the PDP. The informants have adduced reasons for the poor representation of women in politics and parliament in particular, as in the case of Nasarawa State Nigeria. Nigerian women's lack of knowledge of the processes and the political strategies within the PDP has kept the men above the women within the party.

While agreeing that there are other factors inhibiting women political participation based on informant E4's opinion, the lack of political literacy also plays a major role in women's inexperience in politics. The informant contested this by saying

*Women are not allowed to participate in politics, so that goes a long way in affecting women's participation in politics, and again lack of political literacy on the part of the women and competency. So, it goes a long way in affecting women's participation in politics. I have mentioned and lack of political education if we will do away with such. As I earlier said, I mentioned of a lack of political literacy on the part of the women. Some women lack political literacy on how to carry out some of the processes.*

On the other hand, informant B2 proposed strategies to address the challenges of poor political literacy on the part of women. Some women lack politics of women as he recommended saying emphatically

*Exactly, it can be improved through awareness. It can be improved through awareness. By the time the awareness is going on about women, just like on the candidate selection, ah the women will become aware.*

Similarly, informants A1, B4, C1, and C7, has this to say

*The only thing is that the women actually need the guts, they need to summon the courage to be able to contest alongside their male counterparts and ah there was actually a time when we had a woman Nasarawa State House of Assembly and although the State House of Assembly is relatively young, just began in 1999 and ah we had a woman who was one of the even principal officers in the State Assembly but of resent again the women they have gone down, they have not been able to compete favourably with their male folk due to lack of political literacy and so it's quiet, quite a difficult thing for them. But as for the electoral process in PDP, I think it is the only party that gives forms free of charge and encourages women to come out and contest for elections.*

*..... (Informant A1)*

*Finally, leaders should provide political literacy services to women. This will encourage the women..... (informant B4)*

*... If all these problems are addressed, and women are given political literacy, I think that issues will be solved, all will just be fine, perfectly..... (Informant C1)*

*Beautiful. To me, if you ask me if the women get their form at a hundred naira, there should be 50% discount that alone will encourage the women. In my party, the People's Democratic Party, the women get their forms free, they don't pay anything just to encourage them. There is a need for political literacy for women and also, I want the women too to encourage themselves by supporting each other..... (Informant C7)*

Informants stated that NGOs should be allowed to sensitize women because some women feel politics is not for them. They believe women need political literacy because of our culture and African customs and traditions that exclude women. Only by sensitizing and encouraging women, perhaps by increasing the number of women in politics, can they get them to participate and understand why they need to pass legislation. They'll improve. Build women, build the nation. Women improve policies and services that affect them. It will develop them and the environment.

The recommendation becomes essential as it will bridge the gap between women and how policies need to help women increase their political literacy, and to the informant, this will go a long way to enhance women's political participation for more women representation in the state House of Assembly.

#### **(b) Candidate's Popularity in the PDP Selection Process and Its Implication on Women Representation in Nasarawa State Parliament**

Lastly, the opinions of informants showed that one of the biggest challenges facing women selected as the candidate of the PDP is the level of popularity of the women candidates. The informants argued that winning the election is invariably determined by how popular a candidate is among the electorates, in this case, among the delegates who formed the electorates. The implication of the observation of the informants lies in the fact that if a woman is very popular, there is every possibility that they will outsmart men in the selection of candidate election in the PDP and vice-versa. It has become necessary to reveal the informants' position relating to candidate popularity as it is a new discussion in Nasarawa State politics.

Informant F4's position relating to candidate popularity as a panacea for victory in the PDP candidate selection is evident as he said

*Politics is a game of numbers, so you must pass through all those things because people must vote for you. And there is the challenge that most of the aspirants are facing in the election..... Informant F4*

You cannot just come and win an election like that, you must have some track records, and you must have been known based on your popularity for you to be victorious in the election. This view is held by informant P4 which is in line with some of the informants too. For instance, informant B2 observed

*The PDP selects its candidates or their aspirants by allowing everybody to come and buy the form; by the time you buy your form, as ... an aspirant, you go around to sell yourself to the people. The people have known you very well already so even if you come out ten of you, it is the people's choice. The people will choose whosoever they want, and that shows that internal democracy is perfect.*

Finally, informant F2 in his position said

*The challenges are that, at times, there are financial constraints that weaken some of them. Some are very credible, but popularity, they don't have, finance they don't have. So, it becomes a major challenge that leads to producing aspirants unproductively.*

While informant F2 agreed that candidate popularity is a determinant in securing the winning vote in PDP candidate selection, the informant also added financial challenges to be a double challenge for the candidate.

The informants' opinion did establish that one of the challenges of women in candidate selection election under the PDP internal democracy in Nasarawa State is candidate popularity. They claimed that generally, women are not very popular among the people which will earn them election victory even if they participate in politics. The consequence of the unpopularity of women among the electorates served as a great barrier to the representation of women in the Nasarawa State parliament.

## **Conclusion**

After examining the impact of women's under-representation on women's issues in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly during the period under investigation, some major findings were revealed.

The study findings indicate that the factors affecting women's under-representation include traditional, religious, and cultural factors, a lack of electoral integrity, transparency, and openness, the absence of women in the legislative house, the implications for women, and a high level of discrimination against women. These factors have contributed to the absence of women's representation, ineffective policies towards women, such as socio-economic development policies in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly, and the unpopularity of women.

Therefore, this is attributable to the fact that women are absent in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly because there are impediments against women. The findings are a novelty in the field of democracy as they shed light on the reasons why the female gender suffered

non-representation in the legislative House of Assembly in Nasarawa State. Therefore, the findings of this research academically filled the loopholes left in the literature.

Summarily, and according to a study, equal consideration of the preferences and interests of all citizens in policy formulations is one of the bedrock principles of democracy (Verba, 2003). Women typically care about feminism-related issues that are underrepresented in parliaments, such as reproductive rights, gender equality, and other concerns that concern women (Sawer, 2012; Wängnerud & Sundell, 2012). "It would be reasonable to assume that policy preference congruence would favour male desires given the overwhelming representation of men in parliaments. However, there hasn't been much global empirical support for this association to date. Nasarawa State's consistent policy is favourable to men, while women's preferences for policy are not appropriately represented. This study in Nasarawa State tries to pinpoint the factors that influence women's representation and the degree of the gender gap in policy preferences in the state House of Assembly. The lack of female democratic ideals in leadership and conflict resolution methods that tend to be less hierarchical and more collaborative than those used by their male counterparts are all implications of the underrepresentation of women in Nigeria. There is also a growing awareness of the untapped potential and talents of women, as well as women's leadership (Matlosa, 2005).

The findings of this study were also achieved, as they revealed four important things. These include the absence of women's representation in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly, ineffective policies towards women, the absence of socio-economic developmental policies, and the inclusion of women's input in the legislation and its implications for the Nasarawa State House of Assembly.

### **Recommendations and Suggestions**

Given these findings, the informants suggested an extension of voting power to the masses to ensure gender equality, support for women's political participation in candidate selection, a credible electoral process for fair, gender-equitable representation in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly, a check on the influence of godfatherism, the implementation of the UN 35 percent, and special consideration for more opportunity for women, political education and awareness for women, rotation for men and women's selection, and advocacy for women's interest and participation in politics and voting, especially in the PDP candidate selection process.

In order to understand the cause-and-effect relationship of the impact of women's underrepresentation on women's issues in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly, there is a vacuum in the current research that can be filled up with additional studies employing quantitative research.

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