

Same Game, Different Participation in Nigeria: A qualitative study of (2006) National Gender Policy

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Owoeye Gbenga¹ , Aleyomi Michael² ,
Ngozi Bridget Ogor-Igbosuah³ and Babatunde Samson⁴

Abstract

Equal participation in politics are a goal of democracy, independent of gender, race, or ethnicity. This essay contends that if these values are not given top priority and prominence in society, democracy will have failed. By examining the opinions of participants, this study assesses the implementation of the 2006 National Gender Policy in Nigeria. To learn how participants assess the policy's execution since it was created, the research employs a qualitative methodology.

The results show that sexism, illiteracy, and a lack of strong government support are the main barriers to full implementation of the national gender policy. The policy implementation framework is hindered, as evidenced by the participants' experiences, raising questions about its efficacy in promoting gender equality. In order to accomplish the goals of the policy, the government and other players will need to provide better support, raise awareness of the issue, and make firmer promises.

The implications of these findings are examined within the social learning theory, which suggests that behavior is learned from the environment, and that people adapt by observing the consequences of their actions and the actions of others. The research reveals that social learning is critical in the implementation of gender policies, but the limited application of the policy undermines its ability to promote change. Therefore, this paper argues that there is an urgent need for comprehensive action and policy reform, aimed at addressing the limitations identified and ensuring gender equity in Nigeria.

¹ Department of Political Science and International Relations, Landmark University, Omu-aran Kwara State

² Department of Political Science, Federal University of Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State

³ Department of International Relations, Landmark University Omu-aran, Kwara State

⁴ Department of Criminology, Thomas Adewumi University, Oko, Kwara State

Corresponding author:

Owoeye Gbenga, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Landmark University, Omu-aran Kwara State.

E-mail: Owoeye.gbenga@lmu.edu.ng

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Gender, Policy, Nigeria, Participation, Women, Politics

Introduction

The National Gender Policy is meant to provide for equity, liberty from segregation, and at the same time promote gender balancing and human rights across the world. The document according to Owoeye (2021) was sourced from the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Among other thing, it provided for political equality, freedom against discrimination, and encourage active participation across different levels of governance. The policy document according to Owoeye (2021), provides institutional direction for attaining an impartial and gender-equitable society, with women and men contributing meaningfully to, and benefiting from all round national development.

Similarly, the policy overarching goal of gender equality, is to have a society where all categories of human being can benefit from a common privilege, rights and responsibilities available within such society (National Gender Policy, 2006). But, unfortunately, in many cases where gender imbalancing exists, women seems to be isolated or subjected to deprivation on matters that pertains to decision-making and access to the good things of life, such as economic resources among others (Lawal & Ojo, 2006).

Furthermore, since the commencement of the Nigerian fourth republic in 1999, there have been increasing agitation for women participation and representation in politics through policy initiative and legislation. The coordinated and unrelenting push, eventually gained fruition, as National Gender Policy was eventually birthed in 2006, by the act of parliament.

Comparatively, Lawal & Ojo (2006) lamented that women across the globe constitute a disadvantaged social group, but the experience in Nigeria is quite alarming, where political discrimination against women is becoming a phenomenon within the country's political space. Scientific evidence further revels that, Nigeria ranked low, i.e 29 percentage in terms of political participation and representation compared to their male counterparts that ranked 71 percent (Owoeye, 2021). On a global scale, Nigeria ranked fifth lowest in this circumstance.

Luka (2011) blamed the problem of lack of equal participation and representation of women on their fellow women. He argued that, women are not cognizance of their numerical strength, that would have made them to become relevant in the political system. Statistically, and according to the National Population Census conducted in 2006 captured women population to be half of the men.

In the same vein, in terms of quality, it is imperative to state that women comprise of a pivotal national resource, whose ideas, creative solutions and concern for togetherness of social fabric can help change the quality of life and society at large. In order to achieve this lofty feat their participation in national

politics is vital. In other climes for instance, conscious and decisive efforts have been taken and implemented to provide opportunity for gender equality in political participation.

Agbalajobi (2010) posited that the untapped women's potentials and capacity in Nigeria could enhance the quality of governance and increase democratic growth, and development. The United States of America which represents the model of democratic government, for instance has made a giant stride within the past decades to institute legislation that has improved the representation and involvement of women in American electoral democracy, thereby increasing women representation, and addressing feminine concerns (Ajayi, 2022).

Similarly, Owoeye (2021) claimed that women in developing democracy have been noted to an extent involved in electoral democracy via their huge availability at political campaigns and town hall meetings. Unfortunately, their role and impact in the political arrangement is yet to be felt. The narrative in Africa countries such as South-Africa, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Malawi according to Bathily (2020), is such where women have gained a significant in-road into political leadership position, more important at the parliament. Nigeria, is yet to buy into the global consciousness and re-awakening of women participation in national governance, with noticeable women underrepresentation at the parliament since 1999.

Apart from the fact that participation in national governance should provide equal opportunity for all, irrespective of sexism, a fundamental correlate of democracy is inclusivity (Asirvatham & Misra, 2012). In this wise, Owoeye (2021) claimed that, it is not all democratic states that are actually democratic in practice, considering the deficiency of basic democratic ethos, such as equal representation which is yet to be fulfilled in Nigeria.

More so, Diamond in his categorization of democracy claims that, democracy as a political ideology is not discriminatory and promotes egalitarianism especially in national governance, which is anti-discriminatory in nature and practice. It was this foregoing that made some countries in the world to embrace universal suffrage, which enables all adults to take part in electoral democracy irrespective of gender (Diamond, 1987).

Recognizing that a lot is at stake in achieving the overarching and lofty objectives of this policy, in the face of obvious low level of women representation in politics (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010; Ngara & Ayabam, 2013; Owoeye, 2021). This study undertook the tedious responsibility of assessing the level of implementation of the policy document since it was inaugurated in February, 2007.

Study Problem

Gender inequality is a major issue that has pose a big challenge to Nigeria's democratic growth and national development. According to Arowolo & Aluko (2010), historical evaluation of Nigerian constitutions, election rules, and procedures are that of gender hostility against women. For example, from 1922, when Nigeria's

first constitution was drafted, all through to the 1999 constitution, the ambitions and concerns of the feminine gender, who account for at least half of the nation's population, have been unquestionably ignored (Owoeye, 2021).

Okoye, Okoli, et al (2022) contended that, since the reinstatement of civilian government in 1999, the Nigeria political landscape indicates the necessity for constitutional and electoral changes. As it stands, Women have remained almost invisible in the party structure, notwithstanding their minimal representation in governance.

There are large volumes of literatures on factors that have hitherto limited women participation in national governance e.g, Arowolo & Aluko (2010) enumerated such factors as; lack of adequate representation, cultural issues, financial constraints, corruption which has encouraged nepotism, mediocrity, minimal rate of political orientation and increased illiteracy level. But the evaluation of the official document aimed at addressing this national malady seems to have been utterly ignored, hence the need for this study.

Insights from National Gender Policy: 2021–2026

The National Gender Policy of 2021–2026 was framed by the Nigerian government based on the noticeable pitfalls in the 2006 document (Owoeye, 2021). The aim of the policy is to again meet the mandate of gender political equality and good governance, because equity is central to the objective of agenda 2030 “leave no one behind”. Consequently, achieving this major mandate demands that gendered power relations which serves as drivers of political, social, cultural and economic exclusion are frontally dealt with. While the benefits of sustainable development are extended to groups that routinely excluded i.e, girls and women.

Notably, progress and development in human societies require the participation of both men and women. However, it is a truism that women have been historically marginalised in all spheres of life including social, economic, and political spheres. This anomaly has been recognised globally and it has become accepted that issues of women's human rights are important for any meaningful development to take place. Apart from social justice, which demands equal opportunity for all citizens, it is smart economics to plan with both halves of one's population because it benefits society as a whole. Investing in women and girls does not only create a positive development cycle, the opposite is also adjudged to be true, that is, a country that fails to empower half of its population will suffer from lower productivity, slower economic growth, and weaker development outcomes.

However, the objectives of the 2021–2026 policy are as follows;

- a. Eliminates gender discriminatory policies at all levels of government.
- b. Implement gender equality policies and laws
- c. Awareness campaign of fundamental human rights
- d. Ensure that women have access to justice when cheated

The timeframe for the policy germination is already counting, and the achieving these objectives has remain a far cry.

Research Objectives

The overall focus of this study is to re-evaluate the performance of the National Gender Policy concerning women participation in politics since 2006. But the research is aimed at achieving the stated objectives;

1. Know the level of awareness of the policy document
2. Determine the level of compliance with the document, and

Theoretical Framework

This study applied the social learning theory. The theory was developed by Albert Bandura (1977). According to Navabi (2012), the theory is hinged on the premise that human beings been a “political animal” as claimed by Aristotle, often interact with each other within the social setting and often gain from such interactions. Continuing, Navabi (2012) noted that by noticing the attitudes of others, people develop similar attitudes. In other words, individuals assimilate and imitate a behavior, after observing what others do and or say, emphatically when people’s perceived observations are positive ones or include rewards related to the observed behavior.

Therefore, when put within the context of the present study, social learning theory has the explanatory power to highlight the truism that political representation and participation within a social milieu differs because of the values that people cultivates from the political culture or what is known as the process of political socialization (McAllister & Makkai, 1992). Succinctly, how women engage in participatory politics may well be explained by the level with which they are informed by their environment. For instance, women who participate or indicate interest to participate in politics may have been influenced by other women who have a similar type of education, exposure, values, beliefs, expectation, religious ideas and many others.

On the other hand, lack of proper encouragement on the part of women to women to participate in politics is a serious concern. Owing to the above, the basic common crux of social learning theory of Albert Bandura is considered appropriate for the study, because the research focused at interrogating the level at which the National Gender Policy have encouraged women participation in the Nigeria politics.

Methods

To further investigate the central research concerns, the study augmented data generated from the survey with the qualitative data, i.e interview. The study of evaluating the performance of 2006 National Gender Policy allowed the researcher to identified, examined and analyzed thematically level of awareness, and compliance with the policy document. And also, the possible factors limiting its full implementation.

The benefit of this method over others is best expressed in the work of Biggam (2010) where he claims that the outcome is lucid, comprehensive, valid, and reliable. Subjects are found to answer questions more elaborately in qualitative research, providing richer insights that other approaches may not capture. Qualitative methods are method of gathering and analyzing interpretive and subjective social reality in which the researcher is typically immersed. They excel at answering the why, how, and what questions (Saliu, 2017).

Research design layout/Data collection model

Unit of analysis	Criteria/justification	KII
Legislatures	Former and current members of the national assembly	5
Academia	Senior lecturers in the department of law, and sociology	3
Women leaders	Women who have occupied political position	3
Party leaders	Party leaders (ruling and main opposition parties)	2
Religious leaders/Traditional rulers	Religious leaders of the two dominant religions. And high-profile traditional rulers	4
Total		17

Instrument for data collection

The instrument that was used for primary data collection is key informant interview (KII), which has the capacity to source information from identified respondents in the selected case studies. Respondents were chosen based on their knowledge of the subject under investigation (Biggam, 2010). Sample size in qualitative study according to Oni (2020) are typically small, however, one means of identifying how many people are needed is to keep interviewing until nothing new comes from data, or when the data gets to the point of saturation.

For this study, the researcher spoke with fifteen (17) people across all categories, including political party chairmen, senior academia's, traditional rulers', religious leaders, former and current members of the national assembly, and women leaders across party divides.

Data analysis techniques

Data from the primary sources was interpreted via thematic content analysis. The responses from the interviewees was transcribed, interpreted and content analyzed. The preference of thematic content analysis for this study is occasioned by its usefulness as an analytical mechanism because it involves descriptive presentation of data in qualitative work, and allow the researcher, users and readers to make adequate sense of the subject matter (Biggam, 2010; Aremu, 2017).

To help with recording and organization of themes and subthemes, the qualitative analysis program QSR NVivo Version 12 was employed. The researcher checked in with the participants again to guarantee authenticity so that they could confirm the precision and appropriateness of the interpretations. The method (also known as member checking), which Brink (1993: 37) justifies its use as “ensuring that the researcher and the informant are viewing the data consistently,” Themes and sub-themes that are offered in the result section are the outcome of our personal assessment.

Validity and reliability of research instrument

The researcher carried out a pilot study to enhance the validity and reliability of the instrument. The word “content validity” describes how accurately data collected using a specific tool represents a specific domain or the content of a specific notion. This improved validity by making it simpler to review and alter the study instrument as needed. The researcher selected a pilot group of six respondents to evaluate the validity of the study instrument. The pilot study’s data were not used in the final analysis.

The pilot study may have served as a pre-test of the research instrument. The clarity of the instrument items for the respondents was established in order to increase the instrument’s validity and reliability. The pilot study provided the researcher with the chance to familiarize themselves with both the administration of the research and the actual research itself, as well as to identify any areas that required modification. In order to make sure that the instruments measured what was intended, the outcome helped the researcher resolve instrument inconsistencies.

Ethical consideration

The researcher ensured that everyone participating in the research—including respondents, interview subjects, or any other people who were directly involved—was given the opportunity to participate freely and voluntarily. They received comprehensive information on the study’s goals, potential drawbacks, and advantages, as well as their right to leave at any moment without repercussions. Additionally, the researcher ensures that participants remain anonymous by not using any identifying information unless it has been specifically authorized.

Data analysis, presentation of results and interpretation

This section undertakes the presentation and discussion of findings of the study in a way that addresses the research questions on which the study is based. Seventeen (17) key relevant informant were purposively selected and interviewed, and

relevant information that thoroughly addresses the research objectives raised were elicited from those informants.

The choice of respondents was determined by their interest in taking part in the survey. Following a thorough explanation of the study's goals, respondents' agreement was requested before participating. The rights of the respondents were fully upheld and protected. The interview process included a semi-structured interview guide with questions that touched on the study's goals (Baglione, 2016). Additionally, we asked open-ended questions to get information on the study's goals. For instance, the study protected respondents' anonymity by using an alphabet and a number to identify them: from RN1 to RN17 (i.e., respondent number 1 to 17).

We translated and transcribed all KII sessions' field notes and audio recordings at the end of each day of data collection, taking care to maintain the original sense of what was stated. The researcher checked in with the respondents again to guarantee validity so that they could confirm the precision and appropriateness of the interpretations. The method (also known as member checking), which Brink (1993: 37) justifies its use as "ensuring that the investigator and the person who provided the information are seeing the data consistently,"

Results

Research objective one: To know the level of awareness of the policy document

Many respondents noted that there is paucity of sensitization programme for the National Gender Policy (2006), which could have been responsible to its limited awareness among women. In addition, respondents spoke on the need for wider orientation of women on such an important policy. A respondent lamented:

Yes, the policy captured succinctly all the concerns of women in the Nigeria's political space, such as inadequate participation in politics at all level. Unfortunately, relevant stakeholders are not doing enough in the area of policy education. (RN08)

Continuing, majority of respondents averred that, the policy was dead on arrival because of the way and manner it was initiated and implemented. This was how one of the respondents puts it "the targeted beneficiaries of the policy were not consulted during the incubation period hence, they are largely unaware of the policy" (RN12).

Furthermore, many respondents corroborated the assertion as mentioned above, the respondents deduced that lack of sufficient engagement with policy end users is causing a serious disservice to national development. A respondent remarked:

Even the Nigerian Constitution of 1999 was seriously flawed because of the way majority of the citizens were isolated during the framing period. The same thing goes for other national policy documents such as; the National Gender Policy of 2006. (RN04).

Other respondents decried the nonchalant attitude of Nigerian women to national issues such as politics. Respondents argued that, women are not politically sophisticated, as compared to other climes. One of the respondents put it this way;

Women are most times aware of policy designed to enhance their political participation. But there are other salient issues such as; cultural, religious, and sexism limiting their political participation in Nigeria. (RN10).

To this end, most respondents concluded that the national gender policy did not actually serve its purpose. Respondents believed that, most women that are participating in national politics are in it, because of their personal conviction. So, they are self-motivated and not policy motivated.

Research objective two: To determine compliance level

Majority of respondents expressed the view that, Nigerian political actors had yet to demonstrate sincerity in complying with the provision of the national gender policy of 2006. Respondents deduced that the global affirmative action which occupied a central place in the policy document was not rightly activated by the political actors in the country. This was how one of the respondents put it “yes, the National Gender Policy (NGP) provides for the allocation of 35 percent of elective and appointive position for women, but compliance is the problem!” (RN11). This implies that the policy is not the problem as it were, but the readiness to comply with the spirit and the letter of the document.

More so, many respondents noted that, the Nigeria political space is seriously closed against women by their opposite sex. A respondent put it this way:

Historically, political participation was seen as exclusive preserve for men. In some culture, it is forbidden for women to participate in public discuss. The role of women in this regard, is unduly restricted to procreation, and domestic chores. (RN01).

This kind of disposition, and belief is detrimental to women participation in politics and national governance, a scenario that is still taking a toe on women political participation even in this contemporary time.

Furthermore, most of the respondents lamented the way and manner men deliberately disregard the national gender policy, and muzzled women out of political circulation. One of the respondents submitted:

Look at the level of women representation at the national assembly since the commencement of the on-going fourth republic, it is quite discouraging. Compliance with the policy will be a far cry, if women are not adequately represented at the legislature and executive arms of the government as obtainable in other countries, even in some contemporary African nations. (RN16).

Respondents deduced that democratic institutions in Nigeria often have bias for men political participation against women. Many of the respondents referred to

some recent political events in the country where women in opposing political parties were severely manhandled. A respondent put it this way “The Kogi state 2019 gubernatorial election fell short of local and global standard. The election was laced with violence, to the extent that a prominent political women leader was burnt down in her house in eastern senatorial district of the state on the day of the election. The sad event, was an indication of lack of compliance with the policy document. (RN03).

Continuing, respondents narrated how political elites in Nigeria often willfully violates laws and policies framed to enhance democratic growth and consolidation. One of the respondents inferred:

Nigeria is not deficient of credible laws, rules and regulations that would have better the lots of the country in all spheres. But the issue is, lack of will and courage to operationalize those laws, rules, and policies for majority happiness (RN13).

From the above response, it could be deduced that, the culture of policy compliance is fast fading away in Nigeria. This assertion is indicative that the National Gender Policy possess the potential to give Nigerian women their pride of place in national governance, if not for the mundane problem of compliance.

Discussion of study findings

The study investigated respondent’s view of how the National Gender Policy have enhanced and encourage women participation in Nigeria politics. Study revealed lack of policy education, which made most of the women unaware of the policy which has the capacity to enhance their political fortune. This result is in line with previous research (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010; Luka, 2011; Ihemeje, 2013) demonstrating that women are less informed than men about public and political events. Studies also shown the disparity in focus, as men often concentrate more on national politics and governance, perhaps as a means of fending for their families, against women who are more family inclined. It can further be deduced that, lack of policy sensitization could be a deliberate attempt to deny the beneficiary of accessing the benefits that it holds.

The study contributes to the body of literature regarding the extent of political ignorance that may have existed among the sampled respondents, despite the fact that it failed to examine gender differences in consciousness of events in the Nigerian electoral democracy. The political difficulties in Nigeria and around the world, for instance, were unknown to the average woman. The respondents were conscious of their constitutionally guaranteed freedom to take part in electoral politics, though. But are not too certain on the direction to follow, which was well spelt out in the policy document, if there was sufficient education.

The study also revealed that relevant stakeholders were not consulted during the incubation period of the policy which made lots of women to be ill informed of the national gender policy document. This finding is in consonance with (Owoeye, 2021), who highlighted the overarching importance of stakeholder’s

engagement in policy formulation. Aluko (2010) further corroborated this assertion, and decried the way and manner policies are often shabbily formulated and developed in Nigeria, without broad and wider consultation. This however, has implications on the level of awareness, and acceptability of such policy.

The results also revealed that women were seen as being politically less advantaged than men. The study claims that this is because women were underrepresented in politics since there was not a supportive atmosphere for women to succeed in electoral politics. The results further showed that female failed to have the same opportunities as their male counterparts. The behaviour and ideas of women regarding political engagement are likely to continue to be shaped by this emphasis on a norm that favors men over women. According to data, female displayed a huge lack of interest in politics and desire to contest for political office in comparison to menfolk and have lower political ambitions (Owoeye, 2021). This nonchalant has largely contributed towards political activities, as largely contributed to female poor political participation and representation.

The elements that continue to support these views and ultimately prevent women from actively participating in electoral politics in Nigeria were also noted. In consonance with respondents, factors that affected the effective actualization of the policy among others included a deficit of strong government support, declined rate of women access to job and good education, superiority disposition of men and sexism, age, and crisis at voting period, and many more. The lack of sincerity by political actors usually dominated by male had served as a major barrier on the way of the gender policy. The results support past findings that either of the variables mentioned above was to blame for the low levels of political involvement among women in their various samples (e.g., Agbalajobi, 2010; Okoli, Okoye et al, 2022). Furthermore, the patriarchal system, as well as social-cultural, economic, educational, and political issues, continue to prevent women from holding positions important position in government that would showcase their leadership potentials.

The focus on the questions asked (in relation to the elements/factors observed) suggests that age, lower levels of female employment and education, and institutional (e.g., lack of effective government action) socio-cultural (patriarchy and sexism), attitudinal (women's lack of support for other women who are willing to participate) and socio-economic (e.g., these factors) influences have also contributed to the poor performance of the National Gender Policy. The results demonstrate once more that in a climate that fosters discrimination against women, female political engagement is likely to be suppressed, irrespective of the policy document.

The characteristics mentioned could also be helpful for advocacy campaigns, intervention programs, and legislative initiatives targeted at addressing the underlying issues, and gaps that prevent women from participating in politics to their full potential. Additionally, research showing that women's political participation is influenced by socioeconomic factors and sociocultural context has contributed to the confirmation of some fundamental tenets of Albert Bandura's (1977) social learning theory.

For instance, the theory contributed to the explanation of disparities in political engagement as resulting from the ideals that people adopt through what McAllister and Makkai (1992) referred to as the level of policy awareness and maturity. The study was capable to demonstrate the relationships between factors like education, traditional beliefs, religion, etc. and women's degree of political representation and participation. In addition, apart from the deficiencies of the policy document, the study discovered that there was no enough and sufficient women to women support and encouragement in participatory politics. In all, the study concluded that the National Gender policy though well-conceived and birthed by feminist supporters and in the interest of democratic ethos. But the prevailing factors identified in the study are major hurdles hitherto standing in the way of effective delivery and full actualization of the policy in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Women who participated in the study's sample were unaware of the National Gender Policy document. Apart from that, women were seen as being more politically shortchanged and relegated than the opposite sex since they were under-represented in politics and lacked supportive environments for them to succeed. Women's political participation in the study was influenced by institutional (such as the absence of effective government action), socio-cultural (patriarchy and sexism), attitudinal (women's lack of support for other women who are willing to participate), and socio-economic (such as age, lower levels of female employment and education) factors. The low degree of political participation among the study's female participants was predicted by socioeconomic criteria such age, education, marital status, religion, and traditional values.

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ORCID iDs

Owoeye Gbenga  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4210-2833>
Aleyomi Michael  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1595-5323>

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