

An Assessment of Women Political Representation and Participation in Selected African Democracies: Prospects and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This study examined women political representation and participation in selected African democracies of Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe. It is not a comparative study though the goal is to understand the state of women political representation in the democracies. To realize this objective, the study used descriptive qualitative design, secondary data like books and academic articles, as well as the liberal democratic theory to aid analysis. From the analysis, findings showed that women political participation and representation increased tremendously in democracies of Rwanda and South Africa followed by Kenya, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Ethiopia, but very low in Ghana and Nigeria. The findings also revealed that, despite the positive rise in the aforesaid democracies, traces of marginalization, discrimination and gender disparity still exist. Factors like cultural beliefs, religion, economic deprivation, political violence, lack of family support and poor political education were detected as responsible for their challenges. The factors strongly work against women and contradict the ethos of the liberal democratic theory that envisages equal political participation of all genders. To remedy the situation and promote women's political representation in public space, the democracies should adhere to the provisions of their constitutions. Political parties should carry women along in key decision-making as well as provide more seats for women and promote political education. As well, to promote gender equality, women political organizations should be empowered financially. Finally, while the study would benefit policymakers, the women, the citizens and the body of knowledge, it can be replicated in other democracies.

Keywords: Africa, democracy, political participation, representation, women

INTRODUCTION

The acceptability of democratic governance around the world remains undisputable. This is because democracy is a system of government where sovereignty and the authority to govern the citizens are often derived from the people. It is a government of the people (Isma'ila & Othaman, 2016; Isma'ila, 2016). It is also a form of government that encourages and promotes the political



participation and inclusion of ordinary citizens including the womenfolk in the affairs of their state (Azmi, 2020; Kumar, 2020; Fashagba et al., 2019). Political participation in a democracy, Kumar (2020) observed, is the most symbolic ingredient of a democratic society. It is the available crucial means to communicate with leaders in public office and influence policies (Liu, 2020). The above observations simply show that, without political participation of all citizens in a democracy, a system cannot be termed democratic. Accordingly, women in democratic societies need to enjoy the same right to fully and freely participate and be fairly-represented in the political processes and governance of their societies.

However, such participation and representation remain a constant public debate as to the state of women political participation and representation in contemporary democracies. In addressing the issue, available literatures show that gender disparity, with regard to women political participation and representation, continues to reduce dramatically in Western democracies (Bode, 2017; Burns et al., 2018). In Latin America and Africa, however, literatures indicate low women participation and representation in politics amongst other leadership appointments in their societies (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2011; Coffé & Dilli, 2015; Espinal & Zhao, 2015; Jyoti & Durga-Rao, 2020). These only point that, in the Third World democracies including Africa, women participate in politics less than men. It does not portray a real democracy in action.

The unequal political participation of the women notwithstanding, democracy is widely accepted to expand opportunities for women who want to advance their career in public politics (Choi, 2018). It only shows that women are still underrepresented politically and marginalized (Jyoti & Durga-Rao, 2020), and it continues to raise questions on the effectiveness of their representation in modern democracies (Kittilson & Schwindt-Bayer, 2012). In African continent, for instance, Oshewolo and Adedire (2019) observed the situation of women underrepresentation in public life as more critical, worrisome, and undefined. They further noted that, given the lingering culture and tradition of patriarchy amongst other encumbrances in most African societies, feminist struggles and agitations for gender balance in politics and public governance continue to fail. Based on the above revelations, it becomes necessary to explore, understand and describe the state of women political participation and representation in the African democracies of Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe. Though previous studies like



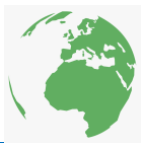
the works of Oshewolo and Adedire (2019), Fashagba et al., (2019), and Liu (2020) exist, none focused on the African democracies mentioned above. Based on the above gap, therefore, this study takes the advantage to fill the gap in literature and contribute to the body of knowledge.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the level of importance attached to this research, the study reviewed important concepts and phrases below. This included political participation and democratic governance; women political participation in a democracy; and women political participation in African democracies.

Political Participation in a Democracy

In modern democracies around the world, including Africa, political participation of citizens in their state processes and governance remains a dominant concept. This is because democracy provides the common people, both male and female, the political opportunity to be part of the decision-making process in their societies. It is also premised on the fact that, in the democratic system, the authority to rule over the people and the sovereignty of the state, are usually derived from the common citizens (Oke, 2010). In a democracy, therefore, political participation as Conway (2000) explained, encompasses the involvement of the ordinary people including the womenfolk in the political governance amongst other processes in running the affairs of the democratic system. Aligning with Conway's view above, inclusion of citizens in the political processes of the state would enable them to, not only influence the quality of public policies but equally influence their decisions in electing their representatives and the structure of the state. According to Conway (2000), in a democratic inclination that promotes the culture of equality and the freedom of the ordinary people, the common people are ordinarily expected to take part in the political routines of such democratic system. The democratic routines, by extension on the above, simply involves taking part in elections, contest for public office, and being active in political party activities amongst others.



Additionally, it is also important to understand that, in a democracy, as Falade (2014) revealed, the consolidation of democracy, stable political system and development can only be maximized when the ordinary citizens are part of the decision-making processes. According to Adelekan (2010), the ordinary people, including the women, must be allowed to contribute to the debate of policies that directly or indirectly affect their welfare, lives as well as goals to maximize their political opportunities and the means of maximizing them. Citizens' political participation, Abubakar (2012) disclosed, is an age-long practice in several societies. Except in monarchical and authoritarian regimes wherein freedom of public participation is often denied, the common people can freely participate in the affairs of the political system in a democracy. The essence, Arowolo and Aluko (2010) noted, is to influence public decisions, contest for government office and harness the distribution of resources in the society. The foregoing proves the importance of engaging the ordinary people including women in the democratic governance of their society. Unlike in a military regime, the people in a democracy tend to be able to influence positive changes in their societies.

Women Political Participation in a Democracy

In a democracy, women political participation simply connotes the free participation and involvement of the womenfolk in the political governance of their state. According to Kumar (2017), active engagement of the women and equal parity with the menfolk in all realms of public governance including in decision-making processes in a democracy, remains important for peace, economic development, political stability. Kumar found that, notwithstanding that the women have the capability to contribute immensely to public policy making processes in their countries, they are discriminated against and underrepresented in political and leadership appointments in many democracies. Supporting Kumar's findings, Barnes and Burchard (2013) exposed a great gender disparity between the womenfolk and their male counterparts in public governance and political leaderships in diverse degrees across democracies.

Though there has been eminent debates and global agenda on how women should be represented and empowered politically, the dream and advocacy remain far from actualization as the women still face several challenges in their political pursuit (Community of Democracy [CoD]), 2017). The CoD concludes that, in spite of the importance and critical place of the womenfolk in political



participation even in the national assembly amongst other public outlets, the political sphere and the environment continue to be a serious challenge and glass ceiling to their full involvement in public life. The above revelations do not match the doctrine of democratic governance which is centered on the equality of all citizens in public life. According to Mlambo et al. (2019), numerous women in various political communities, economies and democracies still face underrepresentation and marginalization. To address their challenges, Uwa et al. (2018), Fashagba et al. (2019), and Oshewolo and Adedire (2019) all agree that all democracies and nations must adhere to the 1995 Women Beijing Conference Declaration that advocates 30 percent space for women in public decision-makings. But as Mlambo et al. (2019) concluded, the 30 percent advocacy by the Beijing conference remains unrealistic in several democracies and still halfway to the 50 percent target canvassed in 2008 by Protocol on Gender and Development.

Drawing from the above, it is very clear that women still face underrepresentation and marginalization in several democracies in which the African continent cannot be an exception. This does not reflect the principles of a democratic system where inclusion and free engagement of the ordinary people including the womenfolk in the decision-making processes of their society remains the cornerstone. The situation of women in political governance, therefore, cries for urgent political attention. According to Liu (2020), there is a paternalistic belief among men in several democracies that politics, by nature, is a man's sphere. Liu's submission could explain why women are discriminated, marginalized, and underrepresented politically in different societies.

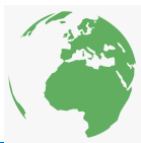
Women Political Participation in African Democracies

Democracy does not only assure the roles of women in politics, but their rights to participate, represent and be fairly-represented in their state institutions, including the legislature (Yusoff et al., 2016). They are critical assets to development, political stability, and democratic solidification (Saidon et al., 2017). The women are not only qualified to lead their countries at the subnational levels, but equally possess the competence to execute leadership at the national levels. Women political participation in public political institutions, at both sub-national and national levels, therefore, has the possibility to bring positive changes in public laws and policies that affect women, their children, and families (Saidon et al., 2017).



The above views show that women are capable of being in public leaderships. Supporting this, Sukhani (2020) stated that even the United Nation's (UN) Women disclosed that women at public negotiation tables often tend to promote collaboration and support across political parties and ethnic divides. They resolve national issues without resorting to conflict and continue to champion social issues in their societies. They also enjoy about half of the world's population, but their representation and engagement in politics remains low (Noreen et al., 2019). According to Noreen et al., despite the tremendous qualities of women in modern societies globally, they still encounter huge challenges in pursuing their career in politics. These challenges, Zadari (2018) declared, range from socioeconomic and society structures which continue to operate as a glass ceiling against women in their political pursuit. In 2017, for instance, statistics revealed that the total political representation of women across the globe was only 24.3 percent (UN Women, 2017). In 2019, also, the same 24.3 percent was recorded (The World Bank, 2019). According to Yusoff et al. (2016), while gender imbalance in politics have been reduced in most Western democracies, it remains a huge challenge against women in the Global South.

In Africa, for instance, it must be made known that the African continent belongs to the Global south mentioned by Yusoff et al. (2016). Africa embraced democratic governance after the Cold-War era, often described as the era of democratization. Also, as in other global continents and democracies where citizens including women are encouraged to participate in the political processes, Africa is not an exemption. In this regard, therefore, Barnes and Burchard (2013) found that, in 20 African countries between 1999 to 2008, women political participation increased while gender disparity decreased. They concluded that the gender disparity dropped, not because men were no longer in politics, but due to women's engagement in active political activities. Also, between 1990 and 2015, Tripp (2016) found upward movement in women political participation and representation in Africa. In African parliaments, for example, Tripp added, their representation rose to 22.2 percent from 7.78 percent. Within the same period, evidence recorded about 12 women speakers in various African parliaments and about 20 percent in government cabinets against 18 percent recorded in other continents of the world (Tripp, 2016). According to CoD (2017), there is not much question about women increase in countries like Rwanda and South Africa. Their women have attained positive increase representation and reduction in gender disparity, but they



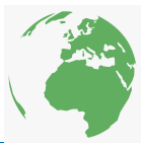
still encounter great gender disparity. This shows that, despite the positive boost in representation in some African democracies, they are still faced with challenges.

Women political representation, Edigheji (2006) observed, is vital ingredient of a democratic governance, but in Africa, it remains a huge barrier to consolidation of democracy and development. According to Isaksson (2014) who studied 20 African countries on the matter of women representation in which 27,000 respondents were drawn, he found that culture, religion, individual economic strength, and unemployment affect women in public representation. Other challenges include gender norms, political clientelism and restricted civil liberties. In West Africa, for instance, as they conclude, political violence often creates a huge gender disparity even during elections. During elections, several women participate but are often scared away because of electoral and political violence. The situation is in sharp contrast to the principles of democracy and cannot in any way ensure stability and development in the society.

According to Ighobor (2015), 72 percent of Africans favor equal gender opening in the distribution of public leadership in the continent, but the absence of this wide acceptance in some African democracies continue to pose a serious challenge to the womenfolk. Using Afro-Barometer, his findings further disclosed that 74 respondents in East Africa favor political equality across genders, while those in Southern Africa settles for 73 percent. Those in North Africa accept only 50 percent favor for equal rights of women. However, in Sudan, 53 percent of the respondents overrule allowing women in leadership positions, while in Egypt, 50 percent of the respondents rejected equal opportunity for women in public leadership. From the foregoing statistics and submissions, women political participation in many African democracies is yet to fully reflect the basis of democracy. While women leadership are recognized in some quarters, others reject it on the bases of gender, culture, and religion. It cannot foster democratic governance and stability if not tackled headlong in the continent and in other democracies.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

This research used descriptive qualitative method to examine the state of women political engagement and representation in selected African democracies of Nigeria, Rwanda, Kenya, Ghana, Tanzania, Ethiopia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Descriptive qualitative method,

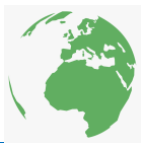


according to Wright and McKeever (2000), is a good research method in exploring and understanding social phenomena that have to do with generating public views. Magilvy (2003) and Braun and Clarke (2013) observed that the interest behind a descriptive method is usually to cast a sound thought on the phenomenon of study to achieve a comprehensive description. The method fits better in explaining political and social events which include understanding women political participation in the arena of politics (Lambert & Lambert, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Nassaji, 2015; Colorafi & Evans, 2016). These scholarly views show the richness and importance of descriptive qualitative method in understanding political and social issues in democratic societies. It is also on the above bases that this study adopted the method to study women and political participation in the selected African democracies aforesaid. Materially, the study used secondary resources like scholarly articles and books from Oshewolo and Adedire (2019), Fashagba et al. (2019), Agunyai and Olawoyin (2019). Finally, the theory of liberal democracy was adopted as a framework of analysis and to aid the secondary data in arriving at a sound conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

The study used the theory of liberal democracy as its framework of analysis to explore, analyze and describe the state of women political participation in the selected African democracies. The use of the theory hinges on its importance and capacity to unpack political issues in different democracies. The early originators of this liberal democratic theory were John Stuart Mill, Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith, and Jeremy Bentham (Othman & Okpe, 2021; Okpe & Taya, 2018; Vincent & Tunde, 2018). According to Vincent and Tunde (2018), liberal democratic theory enjoys wide acceptability in democracies such as Britain, U.S, Canada, and France amongst other Western democracies. In African democracies, also, it is not left behind as it describes the type of democratic governance in practice. The above submissions simply show that almost all democracies in the West and Africa accept liberal democracy as a form of governance.

According to Othman and Okpe (2021), liberal democratic theory encourages a political system where individual liberty, private property, social justice, the rule of majority, right moral development and individual inclusion in political governance are supreme and practiced. It encourages the right of citizens, including women, in a democratic governance to actively



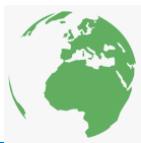
participate and be included in the political and leadership processes of their nation irrespective of gender, ownership of wealth or race (Kwasu, 2013; Oddih, 2007; Mohammed, 2013). The theory advocates a democratic and political organization that efficiently promote gender equality and good governance for all citizens. The advocacy equally involves periodic credible elections and the freedom of citizens to vote and contest for public positions (Othman & Okpe, 2021). Other principles of a liberal democracy include the rule of law, freedom of speech, press, assembly, and religion, multi-party system and existence of pressure groups, and peaceful change of administration (Okpe & Taya, 2018). The above projections by the theory on how a political democracy should operate justify its adoption in understanding the state of women political participation in the selected African democracies. As further noted by Kwasu (2013), Vincent and Tunde (2018), the theory explains how a political democratic system should operate, and this involves the adoption of a universal suffrage political system that promotes political participation of all citizens, including women, their right to contest in elections and be voted for.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the body of academic works reviewed and the adopted theory of liberal democracy used to aid analysis in understanding the state of women political representation and participation in the democracies of Nigeria, Ghana, Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, several discoveries were made and are discussed under the subheadings below.

Nigeria

As one of the democracies in West Africa, result shows that women in Nigeria occupy half of the country's population and equally play vital functions as mothers, economic and political activists, organizers, and time-managers in their society. They are also known in the dynamic global political environment. Their involvement in global politics is exemplified by Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (Director-General of the World Trade Organization), and Amina Mohammed (Deputy Secretary General, United Nations) and many more in the American and British politics. These positive trend were affirmed by Dim and Asomah (2019), Agbalajobi (2010) and Oni (2014). Also, the study

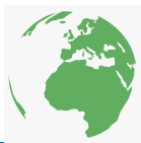


discovered that in the fourth republic which started in 1999, the Nigerian House of Representatives in 2007 produced Honorable Patricia Etteh as its first woman speaker while at the subnational level, the first female governor, Virginia Etiaba presided over Anambra State government from 2006 to 2007. Many women have also served, and are still serving, as ministers in government cabinets and many more spheres. Also, to protect the interest of the Nigerian women in the public sector, the 1999 constitution, in alliance with the 1995 Beijing Conference, which advocated 30 percent space for women in public life, through its National Gender Policy in 2007, establish 35 percent space for women to participate in government. All of these could be termed positive path to better the lives of women in Nigeria.

However, further result proved that, despite the massive population of the women and their vital roles in Nigeria and abroad, the Nigerian political system and the society has failed to give women enough space in public life and succeeded in discriminating against them. This also corroborates earlier findings (Anigwe, 2014; Agbalajobi, 2010; Dim & Asomah, 2019; Orisade, 2019; Jacob et al. 2012). The Nigerian women are underrepresented and marginalized by men in the distribution of leadership positions (Jacob et al., 2012). They are hugely underrepresented in comparison with men (Dim & Asmah, 2019). As a democracy, the practice on ground contradicts democratic principles and human liberty espoused by the liberal democratic theory. It cannot consolidate democratic progress in the Nigeria's fourth republic if not addressed. Between 1999 and 2015, for example, only 8 women served in the Nigerian Senate, while only 19 were in the House of Representatives as lawmakers (Oshewolo & Adedire, 2019). As well, the women percentage in the parliament in 2010 was 7 percent, and it fell to 3.38 percent in 2019 (IPU, 2019). This does not align with the ethos of democracy and cannot consolidate democracy in Nigeria.

Ghana

Similar to Nigeria, Ghana remains one of the democracies in the West African region and shares largely-identical political history with Nigeria. With regard to women in Ghana, result revealed that about 50 to 60 percent of the women engage in agriculture which is the second-largest sector outside public leadership. To ensure the political representation of Ghanaian women, the Ghanaian 1992 constitution, as amended in 1996, established equal rights of all citizens in public life including the womenfolk. The above was affirmed by Bawa and Sanyare (2013) and Sossou

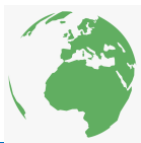


(2011). Based on the legal provision, result showed that women in Ghana have made a positive progress in public life including political leadership. In the parliament, for example, result showed that women representation rose from 7.9 percent in 2008 to 13.9 percent in 2019. The above was also confirmed by Shiraz (2015) and IPU (2020a). Undeniably, it can be established that Ghanaian women have made progress in political participation and representation in Ghana's public life.

Notwithstanding the above developments, result also emerged that women still face myriads of glass ceilings ranging from economic factor, religion and culture that continue to discriminate against them in public life. Others involve patriarchy belief, poor education, and family challenges as confirmed by Shiraz (2015) and Odame (2010). According to Odame, the failure of the Ghanaian women to participate fully in national and subnational politics ranges from the societal view that the political sphere is exclusive to men. The society's view on Ghanaian women, Bawa and Sanyare (2013) added, came from the country's colonial experience. The attitude of politicians, poor public confidence in women, low political education, and political violence during elections work against women (Alhassan et al., 2020). They are not only poorly represented in public life, but also marginalized and discriminated by the menfolk and the society. The above negative indices exist despite the provision of the constitution. The situation of women in the Ghanaian democracy is in sharp contrast with the ethics of liberal democracy. The situation calls for urgent attention for women to enjoy their rightful place in Ghanaian politics.

Rwanda

Unlike Nigeria and Ghana in West Africa, Rwanda is in East African sub-region. It operates a single-party system against a multi-party system which is one of the ingredients of democracy, making some scholars to consider it authoritarian whereas others denote it as a democratic. However, with respect to political participation and representation of women in the country, result proved that, unlike many other democracies in Africa and elsewhere, women in Rwanda enjoy significant positions in the government. Further result proved that through its quota system, introduced by the Rwandan Constitution and the political party, women enjoy the majority in the legislature and remain the highest around the globe as confirmed by Burnet (2011), Bauer and Burnet (2013) and Hogg (2009). According to Guariso et al. (2017), as found in Burundi another African nation, women representation and participation in Rwanda continue to move upward



because of gender quota. The percentage of women in both parliament and ministries of government is above the 30 percent advocated by the 1995 Beijing Conference. The above is simply democracy in operation. It also aligns with the ethos of the liberal democratic theory.

In spite of the above, findings also showed that these women are not without challenges. According to Guariso et al. (2017), women are mostly appointed into lower ministries although they are exalted in Rwanda and there is reduction in gender gap. They also face confrontations from the men who always want to dominate and marginalize them besides exposure to other challenges including marital crises emanating from culture and tradition. From the foregoing, though Rwanda is a one-party system, the place of women in public sector is recognized and, redolent of a true democracy, every citizen has the right to be represented in government. Democracy is the government of the people, therefore, having more women in Rwandan government is normal, but the country is obliged to embrace multi-party system to expand and consolidate her democracy.

Kenya

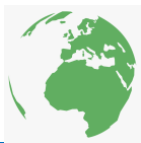
Kenya is a democracy in East Africa like Rwanda. To promote the political representation and participation of Kenyan women in the government, emerged result revealed that the 2010 Kenyan Constitution under Article 27(3) established two-thirds space for women in the government. as confirmed above by Bouka et al. (2019), Kachambwa (2018), Opoku et al. (2018) and Kivoi, (2014). Notwithstanding the above legal provisions for Kenyan women, result indicated that, unlike in Rwanda, women are poorly represented in the Kenyan politics. According to Opoku et al. (2018), discrimination and marginalization of women in Kenyan politics often emerge due to the violent political environment. Result showed that they are underrepresented in the legislature and the executive arms. This was attributed to cultural stereotypes, men's perception and societal belief that work against them in public leadership. Their poor representation was equally confirmed by Kivoi (2014). The above submissions suggest that the Kenyan government fails to implement its two-third requirement of the Kenyan constitution for women. Notably after the 2017 general election in the country which increased the number of women in public leadership, Bouka et al. (2019) observed, that women remain underrepresented.



Aligning with the above, Kachambwa (2018) noted that the poor political situation of women in Kenyan democracy has led to many protests in the country. In the Kenyan parliament, for example, after the 2017 election, result revealed that only 7 women out of the 349 parliamentarians were elected to the parliament. This represents only 24 percent of the women rather than the two-third space established by the constitution. The two-third space provided by the constitution amounts to 117 women parliamentarians, but the women fell short of 41 seats in the parliament. In the Senate, for example, rather than occupying 23 seats as established by law, women occupied only 21 seats. The above indices indicate gender disparity as women occupy only 23.5 percent in the entire Kenyan politics compared to other democracies in East Africa. In Rwanda, for example, women enjoy 61 percent space in the government, 36 percent in Tanzania and Burundi, 34 percent in Uganda and 28.5 percent in South Sudan. According to Kachambwa (2018), it was only after the election in 2017 that six Kenyan women emerged as governors at the subnational level. Though the above showed upward movement in women representation, they are heavily underrepresented in the Kenyan democracy. Their political situation is in sharp contrast with the ethos of the liberal democratic theory and does not consolidate democracy. There is the need to fully implement the provisions made by the 2010 Kenyan Constitution for women to enjoy their political rights.

Tanzania

Tanzania is also a democracy in East Africa like Rwanda and Kenya. With respect to women participation and representation in the Tanzanian politics, findings showed their low participation and representation as well as marginalization and underrepresentation. Affirming the above, Losindilo et al. (2010) explained that, in Tanzania, place of residence, age groups, religion and education greatly influence women participation and representation in public life. However, as argued by Grabe (2015), the underrepresentation and marginalization of women in politics is not only peculiar to Tanzanian, it is a global issue. In addition to the above, further results showed that women with wealth and property in Tanzania stand a better opportunity to be successful and prosperous in pursuing their political career in the country, while those without wealth remain marginalized and discriminated. The above shows that women in Tanzania are marginalized in public space and, thereby, contradicts the theory of liberal democracy that promotes gender balance and equal representation in a democracy. In the Tanzanian parliament, for example, IPU

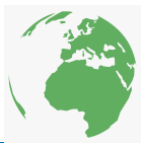


(2020b) proved that the percentage of women parliamentarians moved from 16.4 percent in 1999 to 37.20 percent in 2018 but dropped to 36.90 percent in 2019. The above indices, increase and decrease in representation is a sign of unstableness in women representation. The situation calls for quick redress for women to enjoy their rightful place in the democracy, and to promote political stability and development.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia is a democracy in East Africa like Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda. It equally has a huge women population like its counterparts in the continent. With regard to the place of women in the Ethiopian politics, its 1995 National Constitution under Article Seven made all genders equal in pursuant of public life in the country. The constitution made it clear that no citizen shall be disparaged against in public life on grounds of gender, and this includes the Ethiopian women. Notwithstanding the above, Kassa (2015) has confirmed findings that Ethiopian women, like their counterparts in Kenya and Tanzania, are marginalized and poorly represented in political appointments and other public leadership positions in the system. According to Kassa (2015), despite the huge population of women compared to men, and the persistent debate around the world on women marginalization in several democracies and how to resolve it, women including those in Ethiopia continue to suffer underrepresentation in decision-making processes. This does not only contradict democratic principles, but it also stands against democratic consolidation and human liberty.

Their ugly representation was attributed to factors like religion, social and cultural beliefs, economic deprivation, abysmal violation, and political violence which continue to work against their interest in public politics. This corroborated the findings of Bayeh (2016), Kassa (2015) and IPU (2020a). In the Ethiopian parliament, for example, as disclosed from the findings of IPU (2019), only 2 percent of women were in the parliament in 1997. In 2018, their percentage in the parliament rose to 38.80, but reduced to 38.76 percent in 2019. Their representation increased from what it used to be in 1997, but like in Tanzania, the results showed instability in parliamentary representation. The situation requires redress so that more women can be accommodated in the nation's democracy.



South Africa

South Africa is a democracy in the southern part of Africa. It has a good percentage of women population like other African democracies in the region. With regard to women political participation and inclusion in public life in South Africa, the South African 1996 Constitution stipulates equality and freedom of all citizens in the country including the womenfolk. Based on the above, result showed upward movement in women political representation, but they still suffer gender imbalance compared to men. In the 2019 South African general election, for example, findings revealed that women gained 23 seats across all the political parties in the country and their representation in the national legislature rose to 46 percent. This was equally confirmed by Makgale and Chibwe (2019). The scholars noted that the 46 percent achievement in the parliament remains a huge progress given that they only had 27 percent representation in 1994. In the 2019 provincial elections, their percentage rose from 30 to 40 percent. They concluded that, in the African continent, South Africa parliament has progressed hugely in terms of gender diversity and political dynamism. This is a good development just as in Rwanda where women are also hugely represented. It is a progress for democracy and political stability in the country.

In addition to the above, result showed that, in the global ranking, South Africa remains number 10 and 3 in Africa as confirmed by Makgale and Chibwe (2019). According to Gender Link (2021), women representation in the South African parliament in 2004 was just 33 percent, which rose to 43 percent in 2009 and decreased to 40 percent in 2014 but moved to 46 percent in 2019. Concurring with the above, People's Assembly (2020) also observed that, before 1994 election, women representation, which was just 2.7 percent, increased thereafter. From the ongoing, it can be concluded that women are active in South African politics as they continue to enjoy positive representation like their counterpart in Rwanda. It shows democracy at work and would strengthen political stability and development in the country.

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is a democracy in the South African region and has significant women population. To promote the political rights of women in the country, the Zimbabwean 2013 Constitution in Article 17 (1) established full gender parity in the political system. This means that nobody should be discriminated against in the decision-making processes of the country, as well, ensure the equal

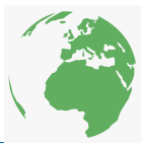


representation of all citizens in the government of Zimbabwe. Notwithstanding the above provisions, findings proved that the Zimbabwean democracy has failed in its effort to achieve sound women political representation. That also agreed with the findings of Mervis (2013). According to Mervis, despite the critical place of the women in national development and political stability, the government and the party system have failed to ensure effective women representation in the country. The above situation was also attributed to illiteracy, patriarchy, religion, economic deprivation and poverty which have incapacitated them from influencing public policies. Zimbabwe practices a patriarchal societal system that works against, and oppresses, women at home and workplace. The society expects them to follow their cultural gender roles (Allbery, 2020). Their political pariah in Zimbabwe is in sharp contrast with democratic ethics.

According to Allbery (2020), due to women underrepresentation in government, the Zimbabwean government set out to achieve 50 percent women representation in the government by 2015, but the quota remains unachieved. Women who manage to engage in a political campaign often face threats, harassment and other forms of political violence. All these pressures constitute a glass ceiling as they continue to discourage women in public life. In 2019, for instance, result showed only 86 women parliamentarians in the House of Representatives, which corresponds to 32 percent of the entire seats in the House. While in the Senate, only 35 women enjoy seats and corresponds to 44 percent, 7 women in the cabinet which represents 29 percent (Gender Link, 2021). Though riddled with many challenges, compared to Nigeria, Ghana and other African democracies, women enjoy better representation in Zimbabwean parliament. However, achieving gender parity remains germane to the realization of democratic consolidation in the country.

Challenges to Women Political Participation in the Selected African Democracies

From the various African democracies selected and dissected on the state of women political representation and participation, results indicated upward movement in the political leadership compared to what obtained many years back. However, the results also prove that, despite the increase in women representation from those democracies, they still encounter glass ceilings. In Rwanda, for instance, despite the huge representation, Guariso et al. (2017) observed that women are hardly appointed into top ministries of government. They concluded that, due to their involvement in politics, they continue to face marital problems and challenges from their men and



many more. In South Africa, which also has a good record of women representation, Makgale and Chibwe (2019) explained that in global ranking of gender parity in politics, South Africa records number 10 and number 3 in Africa but remains low in achieving gender balance with their men in politics. Both Rwanda and South Africa are doing well compared to other African countries, but not without challenges as seen above.

In Nigeria, evidence revealed that women are marginalized in political allocation of offices. They are underrepresented in politics, and they continue to suffer political violence in the country (Jacob et al., 2012; Dim & Asomah, 2019). In Kenya, for example, result showed that, in the House of Representatives, women occupy only 7 seats out of 349 available seats, while occupying only 21 seats rather than 23 in the Senate in 2019. This is stark gender imbalance in Kenyan politics where women occupy 23.5 percent in the legislature compared to its neighbors like Rwanda in East Africa. It is really a sign of gender imbalance and does not represent democracy in its fullness. Women in the above countries need more representation in public life.

In addition to the above, women in Ghana, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe are not left out in the challenges facing them in their political pursuit. In Ghana, for example, Alhassan et al. (2020) argued that women in Ghana are poorly represented in political leadership. They pointed out barriers such as negative attitude of politicians reneging on their promises, political violence and poor political education amongst others as working against women in public life. In Tanzania, factors like cultural beliefs, economic deprivation, negative social attitudes, religion, and abysmal political violence continue to be a glass ceiling against the women in pursuit of public leadership (Bayeh, 2016; Kassa, 2015). The above is in sharp contrast to the ethics of liberal democratic theory. Indeed, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe are not left out. According to Kassa (2015), notwithstanding the enormous population of women around the world and the level of attention given to their inclusion in public, women in Ethiopia continue to face underrepresentation and marginalization in the Ethiopian democracy. They are underrepresented and marginalized in decision-making and political appointments compared to their menfolk.

In Zimbabwe, Allbery (2020) observed that, due to women underrepresentation in governance, Zimbabwean government set out to achieve 50 percent women representation in the government

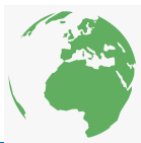


by 2015, but the quota remained unachieved. Women who manage to engage in political campaign are often harassed and threatened with political violence. All these pressures remain a glass ceiling and continue to discourage women in public life in the African continent. From the foregoing, though with rapid increase in representation in some of the democracies, women still face various challenges in their democracies, and it cannot consolidate democracy. The situation calls for a redress so that women can enjoy their rightful place in their democracies in consonance with the projection of the liberal democratic theory. Other democracies can also emulate Rwanda and South Africa to increase women representation and participation in their democratic governance.

CONCLUSION

In democracies, the pivotal place and role of women in national development and political stability remains undisputable. This is because they do not only serve as mothers and managers of their homes and societies, but also as political activists and instruments of political stability (Dim & Asomah, 2019; Agbalajobi, 2010). In addition to the above, Noreen et al. (2019) observed that women's population around the world is almost equal to that of the menfolk. But in terms of political representation, participation and inclusion in public decision-making, women are underrepresented as their percentage remains low. This is despite the acknowledgement that democracy encourages equal representation and participation in the governance processes of their society. This was also espoused by the liberal democratic theory that advocates equal representation of all citizens including women in the public space.

Political participation and representation, Kumar (2020) contended, remains one of the ingredients of effective democracy. Globally, however, women continue to face challenges in pursuing their political careers (Noreen, 2019). According to Zardari (2018), existing society factors such as economic deprivation, patriarchal beliefs and political violence continue to remain a glass ceiling for women in the public sector. In 2019, for example, only 24.3 percent represented women political representation across the world (The World Bank, 2019; UN Women, 2017). The above percentage indicates a huge underrepresentation of women in public life. The records do not reflect democratic governance in full operation and contradict the principle of a liberal democratic theory.



It was based on the above that this study examined the state of women political participation in African democracies of Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe. It used secondary resources, liberal democratic theory as analysis framework and qualitative descriptive design. Based on the above, the study found a tremendous increase in women representation in the democracies of Rwanda and South Africa. While the two democracies above were followed by Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya and Zimbabwe, Ghana and Nigeria came last with the lowest representation and political participation of women in public space. Despite the above increment in the democracies, they are not left without challenges of gender disparity amongst other challenges that work against the women and democratic consolidation. The whole of these argue that women in the democracies are not only poorly represented and marginalized in politics, but also face various challenges. Amongst these challenges, as revealed by results political violence, male dominance, economic deprivation, lack of family support, political threats and harassments. According to Oshewolo and Adedire (2019), the situation of women marginalization in African public life is disturbing and undefined. They submit that, due to the unrelenting culture of patriarchy amongst other encumbrances in the societies, the feminist agitation for equal representation in public leadership has failed to produce desired result in the continent.

To remedy the above negative indices against women, it is imperative to introduce more reserved gender quotas in all the democracies. It would facilitate the full representation of women in politics. The constitutions must demand all political parties to reckon with women in key party decisions. More women wings of political parties must be created and supported with finance from the government. Political education must be increased at the society level to facilitate change of inimical in attitude towards women and, concomitantly, women must learn to build confidence in politics. Finally, the research can be replicated in other African countries and other democracies. This would benefit women, researchers, policymakers, the public and body of knowledge in general.

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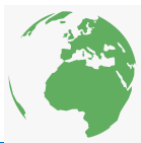
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