

## Electoral Legitimacy and Gender Representation Barriers; Theories and Practices in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*The article describes relevant concepts and theories on Gender Representation and Electoral Legitimacy behaviours and barriers that obstruct global policies for gender equity model to a free and fair election. The limiting barriers and theories described, include Class-Conflict versus Representation Theory, Gender vs Culture, Electoral Legitimacy Deficit vs Dominance Theory, Machismo Culture, Institutional concept, Human Capital, Feminist Rights Concepts (FGF) and the UN Think, Assess, Consider, and Take Action (UNTACT) Concept. The article adopts a descriptive secondary qualitative method to gather data on the key theories, barriers and practices affecting gender representation electoral. Data collection include previous studies, articles, reports, publications, and Electoral Commission official documents already generated. These various sources of information gathered, was critically examined, reviewed, analysed, and synthesized to understand the context in which gender representation barriers exist. Research results indicted Nigeria Electoral process as extremely unreliable at the output-delivery process, and thus, criticised for having flaws and failing to completely enforce candidate electoral rules, which impacts female representation. However, the research contributed to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding electoral theories, practices and their impact on electoral system's legitimacy. Findings suggest, importance of challenging patriarchal electioneering structures, cultural norms, and power imbalances in the political sphere and the need for power dynamics to be examined critically, to deliver effective gender or female representation.*

**Keywords:** *Electoral Legitimacy, Gender Representation, Theories, Barriers, Nigeria.*

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### **Introduction**

United Nations (UN) election team in 2019, reported that female representation in Nigeria politics is far below global and regional standards the number of women in the legislature only saw a slight increase between 1999 and 2007 from 2.3% to the current 7.8 % [1]. Also, in the March 2023 General Election Results, the Independent National Electoral Commission, (INEC) estimated that 96% of female “candidates crashed out and lost to their male counterparts” [2] with a total number of 15,533 candidates on the ballot papers for Presidential, Governorship, National and State assemblies’ elections across the 18 registered

political parties. Female candidates accounted for only 10.1% with a total number of 1,553, the males constituted 13,754, showing 89.8 %. A total of 72 women eventually got elected while 1,48 could not win their ticket thus lost to male counterparts. Comparatively, INEC Conference Press Report, in 2019 shows that about 2,970 female candidates were candidates in 2019, but only 62 won which means 97% failed to get elected. In total, there were only 4 female deputy governors elected, and 40 women also elected to different 36 states assemblies while 18 women made it to the National Assembly [3].

The principles of ruling and being ruled according to Awe (2023) in an interview on international Women ‘s Day assessment, are

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derived from the features of democracy namely “elections, as all citizens are eligible for all offices”, albeit Nigeria data gave a different insight to this philosophy. She recalled that despite excelling in the private sector, Nigeria ranked 184 out of 192 countries in women’s representation at the national parliaments [4]. In the World Comparative Study Report, the global data for women in parliaments from Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU 2021) research on Nigeria Women in election cited as few as 157 women elected candidates to the 469-member National Assembly, since 1999 to date [5].

Hitherto, Awe (2017) opined in the conference for Women Leadership that women’s representations in political ambitions were never rated as relevant to the nation’s development as such, are disadvantaged in the political, economic, and social leaderships from the era of the first election in Nigeria in 1923 to date [6]. Only a handful of women from privileged backgrounds are nonetheless able to participate in the election, to be voted for, while the majority are being exploited mainly to vote instead of being allowed and supported to stand in for elections. Still, even such token efforts had no constitutional backing and were thus subject to change.

Unfortunately, in abysmal failure the introduction of Electoral Act framework in Nigeria from 2006, to the most recent 2022 Electoral Act Reform have indirectly and surprisingly, increased political parties ‘opposition to transparent process of representation [7]. Multiple empirical survey on Gender Policy Review by International Foundation for Electoral Systems, (IFES) Nigeria (2023), [8] have demonstrated that electoral laws are inconsistent with women’s representation because women candidates are not well-supported by the same laws as there is no enforcement of those regulations in practice. IFES described such behaviour as a violation of citizens’ fundamental rights to exercise political power, as enshrined in Nigeria 1999 constitution. The recent election is also example

of a preventive democracy for women” because “it is no fallacy the 2023 general election ended in adjudged bitter struggles and protests from the public due to the large-scale rigging and intimidation.

The National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS,2023) Conference Report enumerated that a significant portion of the Nigerian population observed the 2023 elections in relation to the August 2022 elections in Kenya [9]. In both cases, The U.S department of State Summit (2023) also recalled that “a winner was announced, but the primary opponents filed a legal challenge, claiming the vote counting and the verification webpage had been compromised through hacking” [10]. This is where electoral legitimacy is seen to become tweeted at the delivery and output level. In Nigeria the president elect in person of Ahmed Bola Tinubu was sworn into office without the court injunctions on the election result. Even though, the two opposition parties People democratic party (PDP), and the other, Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP) continue to contest in court, the result of the election and awaiting judgement. But when it was held on September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023, both candidates’ petitions were dismissed in favour of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) Party on the ground of lack sufficient evidence.

This article’s position is based Christensen and Setala (2020) idea that, “if a government is seen as legitimate, then the process that produced it is also considered legitimate”. Conversely, “if a government is seen as illegitimate, (as presented by the public in the 2023 elections) then, the process that produced it is also seen as illegitimate” [11].

Therefore, the objective of this study is to provide a thorough examination of factors contributing to gender representation barriers including theories and practices, the cultural norms that hinder women’s participation in electoral processes. By conducting an in-depth analysis, we seek to uncover insights that can inform policy recommendations and

interventions aimed at enhancing electoral legitimacy through improved gender representation in Nigeria's political sphere.

The study aims to investigate the barriers and practices that impede gender representation in Nigerian elections and understand their implications for electoral legitimacy. By examining the challenges female candidates face and the factors contributing to their underrepresentation, this research seeks to shed light on the existing gender gaps in Nigerian politics and propose potential solutions for enhancing gender equality in the electoral process. However, the problem to be addressed in this study is the significant disparity in gender representation in the 2023 Nigerian elections explained above. Despite the introduction of electoral acts and policies promoting gender equality, female candidates face substantial barriers that hinder their success at the polls. This underrepresentation of women in political office raises concerns about the inclusivity and democratic legitimacy of the Nigerian government.

Candidates vying for significant political positions, such as governorship, presidency, legislative seats, or parliamentary positions, often encounter various challenges and strategies related to the allocation of party positions. These challenges arise from several factors: (a) The incumbent party desires to maintain power for two consecutive terms. (b) The inclination to favour senior members of the party when allocating positions. (c) The influence of male candidates' popularity and the amount of money they contribute to the party's campaign. (d) The party's criteria for selecting acceptable candidates and the negotiation methods employed to choose desired candidates may extend beyond considerations of gender and public interests. The current state of affairs in Nigeria is perceived as an abuse of power by politicians, particularly party chairpersons and committee members. These individuals prioritise their party's interests by favouring affluent male candidates over female candidates

who aspire to compete for the same positions. In IFES, (2010) arguments, these practices, fail to accurately depict the practical aspects of electoral legitimacy, leading one to believe that statistical data suggests women face challenges in attaining gender equity within the strict and demanding processes of party nominations, despite electoral regulations ensuring equal opportunities to compete for the same positions [12].

Several measures have been implemented in Nigeria to address the gender representation gap in politics. These include the introduction of electoral acts and policies, such as the 2006, 2010, 2015, 2019, and 2022 electoral reforms, which aim to promote non-biased gender representation in political offices. Additionally, efforts have been made to increase awareness about women's political participation and encourage women to run for office through various capacity-building programmes and advocacy campaigns by the civil societies in collaboration with Women Affairs government agency.

Nonetheless, determining the best solution for addressing the gender representation barriers in Nigerian elections requires a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness and impact of the existing measures. This study critically evaluates the outcomes of the implemented electoral acts and policies and the success of conceptual frameworks in capacity-building programmes and advocacy campaigns. Through this evaluation, it is anticipated that the study will contribute to identifying the most effective strategies for enhancing gender representation in Nigerian politics.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that may affect the study. Firstly, the research will rely on available data and information, which may have inherent limitations or biases. Additionally, conducting research in politics and elections can be complex due to various factors, such as the influence of power dynamics, social norms, and cultural contexts. These complexities may present

challenges in obtaining comprehensive and unbiased data. Additionally, time and resource constraints may limit the study's scope, impacting the analysis's breadth and depth.

This research aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on gender representation and electoral legitimacy in Nigeria. By identifying the barriers and practises that hinder female candidates' success in elections, the study can inform policymakers, electoral bodies, and civil society organisations on potential strategies for promoting gender equality in Nigerian politics. The findings and recommendations of this research may serve as a basis for developing targeted interventions and policy reforms to enhance gender representation and strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the Nigerian government.

## **Methods**

For this research, the researcher has chosen a secondary qualitative method to gather data and analyse the theories, barriers and practices affecting gender representation in Nigerian elections. The secondary qualitative method involves the collection and analysis of data that previous studies, reports, publications, literature and official documents have already generated. The researcher has reviewed and analyse various sources of information, including academic articles, reports from electoral bodies, governmental publications, and relevant literature, to understand the barriers and practices related to gender representation in Nigerian elections. The researcher critically examined and synthesized the information from these sources to draw meaningful conclusions and develop a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Moreover, secondary data is cost-effective and time-efficient compared to primary data collection methods, as it avoids the need to conduct new surveys or interviews. Additionally, the secondary qualitative method is appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena and understanding the context in which gender representation barriers exist. By

analysing existing qualitative data, the researcher can gain insights into the multifaceted nature of gender dynamics, cultural norms, and political practices that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in Nigerian politics.

Other methods, such as primary data collection through surveys or interviews, could have been considered for this research. However, primary data collection required substantial resources, including time, funding, and participant access. Given the scope and scale of the research, it may have been challenging to gather a representative sample of participants and conduct extensive interviews or surveys. Moreover, the secondary qualitative method ensured a comprehensive topic analysis and avoided potential biases associated with primary data collection. This research collected the data through secondary literature sources, including academic articles, government reports, and relevant documents. The researcher thoroughly reviewed academic databases, government websites, Wikipedia and other reputable sources to identify secondary sources that discussed theoretical frameworks on electoral legitimacy and gender representation. Key search terms related to the research aim, such as "electoral legitimacy," "gender representation barriers," and "theoretical frameworks," were used to retrieve relevant literature. The researcher reviewed theoretical frameworks on electoral legitimacy, drawing from various disciplines such as Legitimacy theory, Class conflict theory, Election theory, Gender theory, and Representation theory. These theoretical frameworks provided a foundation for understanding the complex dynamics of gender representation barriers in Nigerian elections.

The theoretical frameworks provided insights into the factors contributing to gender representation barriers and the implications for electoral legitimacy. The data collected from the secondary literature were used to address research questions related to the barriers and practices hindering gender representation in

Nigerian elections. The data collected through secondary literature and government reports were also used to support the development of recommendations and potential solutions for enhancing gender representation in Nigerian elections. By drawing on the insights and empirical evidence provided by the theoretical frameworks, the research aimed to propose strategies and interventions that address the identified barriers and promote gender equality in the electoral process.

Lastly, content analysis was used to analyse the collected data from secondary literature and government reports. Content analysis is a systematic approach to analysing qualitative data by examining the content, themes, and patterns present in the text. It allowed the researcher to systematically organise and categorise the information extracted from the literature and reports. This approach facilitated a structured analysis and ensured a comprehensive examination of the data. Content analysis also enabled the identification of common arguments, theoretical perspectives, and

empirical evidence across different theoretical frameworks. By categorising the data according to relevant concepts, the researcher gained a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to gender representation barriers and their impact on electoral legitimacy. This method helped identify the similarities and differences between the various theoretical frameworks, highlighting critical areas of agreement and divergence.

Additionally, content analysis provided a rigorous and transparent data analysis approach. The categorisation ensured the analysis was grounded in the data, reducing the potential for bias or subjective interpretations. Furthermore, the content analysis helped synthesise the findings and present a coherent narrative addressing the research aim. By organising the data into meaningful categories, the researcher could comprehensively analyse the gender representation barriers in Nigerian elections, backed by empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks.



**Figure 1.** Concepts & Theories Limitations

## Theoretical Frameworks

### Class–Conflict Vs Representation Concepts

Maddock recalled Karl Marx Wikipedia explanation of the “type of society we live in concerning class struggles and class stratifications between different social classes, particularly the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; the workers and the owners; or between classes conflicts and stratification based on poverty, culture, religion, ethnicity, oppression, exploitation, deprivation, marginalization, sexuality, gender and nationality” [13]. In light of this theory, one can argue that the conflict of interests between political actors in Nigeria’s electoral process is in contrast, to the ruling government’s abilities to manage the existing political class conflicts that determine the nature of representation. But on the other side, representation concept in the Wikipedia of Political Science (1968) is described by Huntington (1968) as a political climate essential for a healthy democracy. He argued that situations of biases, by which some groups of gender are perceived in politics, have had an indirect impact on misrepresentation and have created an environment in which “ethnicity, sexism and gender-based discrimination are not challenged irrespective of its direction” [14]. This has led to a culture in which existing multi-party grouping and women’s voices are not heard or respected. Therefore, the theory consists of pseudo-power-struggles during electoral contests between various political candidates and their Godfathers to wedge power to their candidates in lieu to control.

Despite its relevance, class conflict and representation theories can be rated engendering economic class as the most critical of all relationships in society. It can be interpreted that Marx focused on economic conflict between classes, while ignoring the interplay of power, which potentially triggers representation conflicts. Alice-Bonasio described it as the quest for quasi-representation, among political elites

[15]. The criticisms notwithstanding, both theories are flexible to accommodate all types of political parties’ representation that often-marginalized women through party-class conflicts of interest. For instance, political parties in Nigeria have become a threat to women’s visibility in contesting top leadership positions. In past elections, many interested women were asked to step down for zoning mechanisms of position, through power struggle, and various criteria such as seniority by age and by party membership commanding potential political class divide. Also, the use of money and its availability in politics displaces women more often than cultural biases. These potential factors have led to electoral violence more often building up a reputation of party dependability on individual rich candidates while a peaceful win is put at risk. Since independence, according to Ojo (2010) Nigeria, has no record of a woman presidential candidate nor a woman governor except Serah Jilbrin who between 1999-2012 was a presidential flag bearer who was never elected. Also, the female parliamentarians, are sparingly fewer than expected at less than 10% since Nigeria independence in both states and federal levels [16].

Therefore, it can be concluded that the true meaning of representation in politics remains suppressed in approach to the public views of legitimacy. Nonetheless, Feminist theorist like Ae This suggests that existing disproportionate numbers of men and women in elections would continue to attract different modern perspectives due to government applicability of gender neutrality” in electoral rules thus ignoring women candidates’ choices of ‘standing’ for election as men. Most importantly, electoral rules are meant to make political parties accountable from the main criteria of competency, transparency, and visibility, as these factors should define the outcomes of their public choices. But methodologically, this is not the case thus leading to abysmal drop-out of women than men during campaigns. With significant shifts in party nominations, such

demeanour raises eyebrows on the quality of electoral legitimacy and its weakness to protect individual interests beyond neutrality.

Charlotte, and Scott (2006; 2012) buttressed representation theory within women biology citing the concept of “dominance and deficit approach” [17]. The duo emphasised, the significant difference between both approaches within gender and judging by their peculiarities as opposed to the “similarities in identity approach”. They argued that masculine structuralism is based on “performance approach” and “transversely approach” even at feminist post structuralism”. These distinctions serve as useful tools, to women biology. In India, Suchitra in pillars of modern India (1994) examined how the biology of a woman have shifted their lifestyle from “dominance and performance approach” to “identity and deficit concept” of the woman assigned by her structured biology [18]. Such that at early ages 9-15 teenagers are married away through the permissive culture and families in areas like northern Nigeria and poor areas in India. In both countries, 38% parents arranged their children marriage before the age of 18” with majority having their first child at such other minor ages.

The scientific debates around the biology of the woman have its implications on female political ambition requirements which include time, publicity, visibility, and financial positions along party demands for elective positions as political parties’ nominations are monetised and time -bound. Thus, the biology concept is significant in considering competing variables of ideas of independent and dependant variables to explore the ways in which they intersect with concepts of electoral legitimacy, class conflicts, and gender representation. Unexpectedly, the reproductive pattern of the female tends to emphasize women’s home responsibility to their immediate environment and the types of family bond they share. But at this point it suffices to say that the interactions of the varying positions in these theories or concepts are often highly

complex such that each approach is continuously re-introduced to the field of feminist research

Other theories include Institutional, Human capital, Machismo culture, Gender and culture, Feminist rights concept (FGF), Electoral Legitimacy, and United Nations TACT theories and concepts.

### **Gender and Culture vs Feminization Theories and Other Barriers**

According to Gilens and Benjamin I. Page (2014) “gender and culture” are complex variables of sexual differences perceived to regulate human lives because it connected to the very structures and sources of identity”. The interactions between gender and culture are evidenced in the way the two traditional genders are classified as discrete entities, one group domesticated and traditionally assigned caring roles and the other adopting overarching positions of employment and governance. Thus, gender from the perspective of feminisation theory, is interpreted as being those culturally available femininity and masculinity identities and all the traits which are culturally associated with being either ‘male’ or ‘female’. The limitation of this theory is posited in the biological classification of sex, which in turn controls responses to the world because of the nature of a given gender carries [19]. It could be argued that assigned gender pre-determines the dominance of males within leadership structures and underpins women’s underrepresentation within such enclaves.

To this end, Cornelius (2002) gave a broader discussion on the theories of ‘Capacity’, in institutional management and ‘Human Capital’ [20]. While Ehrensaft and Edgardo, (2011) examined ‘Machismo Culture’ theory of “a set of rules” which drives male compliance, both consciously and unconsciously, with the intent to remain in a position of panoramic power within all areas of leadership [21]. In essence, a form of patriarchal leadership with an implicit agenda of silencing feminisation (women’s composition), ensued as much as women’s

voices are implicitly suppressed and rarely heard. This also explains why the gender debate is rarely heard when directed at senior women elevated to management positions, focusing on their leadership styles. Allan (2014) in his book "Gender Knot" defined it as more of a gender defeminisation of women and making a "rhetorical extension of the machismo culture" [22] of making a system work well for men whilst being almost impossible to traverse for women, to maintain same extant leadership structures.

Significantly, Student (2015) cited instances, at various points in history, when women have arguably struggled with prevailing social realities and assumptions in various ways. For instance, the assumption that man have shifted from being a conservative force in holding women back from achieving their full potentials (for the sake of their children) to the contemporary view that women are responsible for the erosion of our caring society, with high divorce rates and ensuing social instability [23]. In his adjudged process, women are faced with making difficult choices between getting married or staying single and having children or focus on being successful within the professional realm. Thus, it is evidential the woman has to choose between prioritising her political career ambitions at the expense of her social and private relationships. Soklaridis and Kuper (2017) et'al were of the opinion that the few women in party politics exhibit de-feminisation traits to agree with the machismo culture of politics., i.e, the practice of being at work (with no family life), a price they seem to accept as needful for status leadership advancement" [23]

Such a theoretical introduction outlines the personal price of excelling within political sector service, which entails coping with all the contradictions, the political environment brings. In summarising institutional theory, one may opine that, as the care clock ticks, the career clock is asynchronous, with women frequently facing the most demanding pressures in coping with political culture of leadership which

invariably include competing with political party male folks to sit, question, think and decide as in patriarchy systems. These are the prevailing characteristics of male leadership executives which feminisation theorists reluctantly acknowledged.

Another critical theory of relevance in this discourse is the human capital theory rationalised by Cornelius (2002), he argued human capital theory was conceived when there was a general absence of women in the political boardroom. The academics gave specific reasons for their absence, including female characteristics, of their biology, age, education, number of children, background, social status, influence, ethnicity, nationality, reputation, marital status, and career history. Also, noted the paucity of experience amongst early women in terms of higher team management, international involvement, language, operational experience, political mentoring, and the boardroom, all of which are considered essential at entry level into elections for both the processes of feminisation and for leadership [24]. Invariably, the potential gender inequalities arising under capability theory, means that contemporary academics have to weave various other doctrines together to make sense of the malaise, including those of human capital, ethical culture, social theory, and perhaps more familiar theory of organisational justice, all of which can be interpreted to understand gender inequalities and their relevance to women political development.

In contrast, to human capital theory, institutional theory according to Adapa and Allison (2018) focuses on organisational practices that give weight to the concepts of rational myths, 'isomorphism' and legitimacy. Until recently, the theory of rational myths suggested for the few qualified women might have 'legitimate' access to the political boardroom [25]. This theory also examined the 'de-feminisation ratio' of the boardroom, explaining why almost all extant female directors now carry the same behavioural characteristics and outlooks as their male



counterparts. This is regarded by Adapa as a form of ‘isomorphism’. In the ‘Macho Culture of the public domain’ Muzio, S. and Balton, D., (2008), emphasised the many barriers created by a political culture of competition in terms of gendered leadership and the machismo culture surrounding work [26]. The authors explained that men are sandwiched “between the traditional machismo culture and economic systems; couple with management models of gendered interests often are created and run by male professionals who are primarily detached from equality issues” Therefore, Cohen (2016) said decades have witnessed “A paradigm shift towards a post-feminist discourse” seen as made

difficult by male refusal to participate in social change” There remains, therefore, an impasse between traditional culture and transformational politics [27].

Hence, developing essential leadership and political skills would, in essence, drive how such skills are deployed to some specific areas within electoral structures. Similarly, some barriers are often understood in terms of inequalities arising within capability theory, wherein such eventualities are described as relating to inadequate skills or a lack of time for political leadership as discussed following the table below.

**Table 1.** Female (Age) Representation Barriers

<b>Female Age</b>	<b>Barrier 1</b>	<b>Barrier 2</b>	<b>Barrier 3</b>
24	Reproduction Roles	Care Giving Roles	Gender Discrimination
34	Life Skills & Career	Developing Career Paths	Gender Competition
40	Family Life Roles	Mother	with Children development
65	Poverty	With Low Input	Retirement

The barriers listed above are all evidenced in traditional politics as channels to place women into ‘stereotypical’ roles, even in political parties’ appointments, to contribute to “greater effectiveness”. However, addressing the under-representation of women within leadership or political roles means exploring issues of ‘inclusivity’ (here defined as ‘all-encompassing potentials’) and exclusivity (‘the gender-specific uniqueness’) of both male and female leadership skills. Thus, ‘gendered’ differences usually comprise those criteria employed to direct the selection of appointments for specific roles over others and to evaluate a ‘leader-followers’ dynamism within the conceived role of political leadership. A throwback analysis of the above variables shows highly compelling responsibilities faced by women aged 18-65, such as looking after their elderly, spouses and children, this role of caregiver’s conflicts with their passion for leadership. The family roles, however, lead women to make informed choices between whether to work, go into politics, or

become an entrepreneur. Politics dynamism is often controlled by the type of career, time, culture, preferences, and expectations in both private (family) and public work life, which may conflict with public life job roles as well. They need more public innovation or confidence to conceive and compete in elections. In contrast, consistent male competition with women in politics or during elections and with the lack of enforcement of equality policy for more significant impact has hampered feminisation theory and women’s potential to risk what it takes to join leadership career paths.

### **Other Limitations and Practices**

#### **Sexual Discrimination**

Any form of discrimination that relates to gender according to Shea (2017) poses a severe obstacle to women in politics. Shea pointed out that such barriers to women’s ability, as an implicit facet of feminisation, to break the glass ceiling include assumptions about women and conflicting expectations of women [28]. Also,

women are perceived to lack confidence and are not severe enough to expand their political terrain. This is explained due to the persistence and prevalence of gender stereotyping. However, women were seemingly complicit in allowing men to keep their positions of privilege. They thus tended to prefer to revere men in leadership positions, leading to sexual harassment in most cases in politics.

### **Absence of Mentorship**

Mendes (2018) emphasised in his study that another significant obstacle to feminisation (women) is the relative lack of a ‘critical mass’ [29] of highly recognised or significantly successful mentorship and routines. Mentorship is an arrangement in which a person with experience and knowledge in a given field effectively guides and supports another to facilitate their learning and development. The convention usually includes a person in a leadership position who provides direction and assistance to a person in a junior position. While higher education institutions have embedded the importance and value of such guidance, establishing formal structures to support this process, such mentorship is often informal and absent for Nigerian women in politics. According to Okonjo Iweala (2022) a former minister of finance in Nigeria, traditionally, women have had fewer opportunities for guidance in politics than their male counterparts [30]. This is assuming a serious obstacle to women’s political leadership development as it implicitly propagates the patriarchy.

### **Social Inequality**

Taking a clue from UN Secretary –General conference report (2022) on gender inequality says 58% of all lower career positions are currently occupied by women, and such inequalities is observed most apparent among Asian and African women who also facing issues of social and racial inequality [31]. However, there are also barriers to women maintaining proper political alliances with the

topmost decision makers and, in turn, they often develop ineffective relationships with policy makers. Within the overarching process of feminisation theory, the position choices taken by women tend to be the easier options. Unexpectedly, maintenance of any form of alliances with leaders is often unwelcome and can often only be achieved when feminisation is empowered within the wider society.

### **Intimidation**

Nigeria women and politics can be regarded as implicit clash of interests as politics tends to force women to have to choose between their political paths and their families. According to Okonjo.I (2021) in a conference interview, explained the type of inherent conflicts, violence and intimidations suffered during her tenure as minister of finance at the federal level Nigeria. Her father was kidnapped and torture for severally weeks in Nigeria before his release, a measure of “changes within the traditional lifestyles of a woman who seek to balance their public careers and personal lives” (Okonjo, I. 2021) [32].

Furthermore, it becomes a real issue for those women who aim to achieve a harmonious balance between their lifestyles and their professional strategies. There are also many women who occupy executive positions who have children, and this has a profound influence in shaping their careers.

### **Failing to Adapt**

In a similar vein, Parkinson (2003) opined that women are not as task oriented as men in politics, and the direction they often follow during elections can be interpreted as being ‘vague’ given the contrasting social and familial roles they fulfil [33]. Further, the author is of the view that women cannot find the ‘right direction’ to fulfil their political goals. Arguably, the direction of the roles that need to be fulfilled by women becomes a critical issue to Cook (2018) because he’s of the view women cannot

balance their multiple roles and face difficulty in doing so [34].

Thus, feminisation theory and practice fail in various theatres to adapt the skills and strategies to meet the career goals, “women in Crook opinion “are unable to adapt to the strict policies of their political environments because of the sensitivity required of those positions”. Thus, such inclinations inevitably become barriers for women, but adaptable by the male folks (Crook 2018).

### **The Conservative Force of ‘Machismo’ Theory**

Jacobsh, (2004) discussed “Machismo” theory of male conservative assessments of feminisation (women characteristics), citing instances of underlying prejudice, both direct and indirect, in aiding representation practices [35]. The implications of judging people less favourably than others based on their sexual orientation, gender, culture, is a form of direct discrimination. In practice, it creates setbacks for the impetus towards feminisation or lead to the recruitment of staff of the same orientation such behaviour is an indirect consequence of gender discrimination, whether conscious or otherwise [35].

Stephenson [36] presented other choices where women tend to have to qualify to compete for leadership positions, particularly in politics, but continually face contending factors and impediments to contend with male violent towards their female colleagues. Such practices at work degrades their work, or in politics creating a hostile environment that thwarts their ambitions. [36] It can also point towards the prevailing uncertainty in the cultural acceptance of women within leadership positions, which has therefore become accepted as ‘common ground’ for competition but certainly has far-reaching implications for the feminisation movement.

Interpreting the crux of the under-representation concept of women in political positions is not because of a prevailing ‘incompatibility’ of female ambitions or

corporate needs, Weber (2013) however see it as a reflection of inefficiencies in electoral legitimacy. He opined that decision-makers lack experience or readiness to take stock of their actions, and inevitably a refusal or ignorance to take on the next steps in the “evolution of a balanced gender-political movement” [37]. This becomes the primary issue in the 21st Century and would serve as the practical roadmap for gender-balanced political leadership and a potential pivotal battleground for women’s progress.

### **Results**

Electoral Legitimacy theory, in particular, has direct relevance to the study of this nature in empirical research. In Reus-Smith (2007) theory of legitimacy, elections have been theorised to reinforce compliance with incumbent government regulations, by strengthening the capacity or ability to co-opt legitimacy for regular elections [38]. However, Smith theory distinguish the perception of legitimacy between input and output-based legitimacy. In this research, this theory is intended to explain the legitimacy of a political system as determined by the extent to which its electoral processes are perceived to be fair and accessible by all, irrespective of class or creed. While Gilens and Page (2014) surveyed 1,779 electoral policy issues, showing many empirical research results. Part of the issue is: there are policy influences of one theory over another that would impact the legitimacy process [39]. Multivariate analysis from the survey indicates that economic elites and organised groups could have represented business interests which have substantial independent impacts on any other government policy.

Part of the survey results supports the theories of Economic-Elite Domination and Biased Pluralism. Arguably, it is exclusive of Majoritarian Electoral Democracy theory and Majoritarian Pluralism as the relationships meant that they are irrelevant in the legitimacy theory. This shows, in practice, that the majority

of the electorate is ignorant or has little knowledge of the Majoritarian concept concerning governance issues that affects their lives and representation.

In addition to above concept, Simons (1996) draws alternative concepts from United States Feminist Rights -Gender Framework (FGF) to explain how the various harsh political environment controls gender dynamics of electoral legitimacy practice. It looks to understand how gender representations can shape electoral rules, processes, and outcomes. This is because the feminisation of leadership encompasses FGF as an analytical tool to examine relationships between gender, power, and the environment [40]. Arguably, first, male power can interact to control resources and the environment. Thus, the framework has emerged from UN recognising that gender is a social construct and should be considered when considering eco-political issues. Tobais (2018) in same concept highlights how gender inequalities can influence the way people interact with their political environment and how this, in turn, influences the outcomes of both genders' experiences in power and marginalisation [41].

Simons (1996) recalled the phrase UN TACT's dynamic risk assessment framework, in his book to which shows how women can start to deal with electoral issues before entering into partisan politics using Simon informed UN TACT, which means to "Think, Assess, Consider and Take action" [42]. He noted that on one hand, women face prejudice in political interactions towards partisan politics and are hindered due to the negative characteristics of their group gender in partisan politics. Women are treated less favourably than the male, in electoral process because the latter (the male group) is thought to have protected characteristics or associated with a mentor with some protected entitlements [42]. This overview emphasised how important it is to understand feminisation (women development) from the context of perceived gender ideologies.

## Discussions

The results of this theoretical research align closely with the study's objectives, which aimed to explore the barriers and practices hindering gender representation in Nigerian elections and their implications for electoral legitimacy. The findings shed light on the coercive nature of electoral processes and the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within the Nigerian political landscape. By examining the influence of cultural norms and power dynamics, the results provide valuable insights into the complexities surrounding gender representation barriers and their impact on the legitimacy of the electoral system in Nigeria.

The study's results indicate an increasing amount of evidence supporting the necessity of certain elections incorporating both coercive and co-oversight functions. Nevertheless, the existing body of empirical evidence is limited in supporting the notion that conducting elections significantly enhances a leader's legitimacy, particularly in the context of autocratic regimes. Scholars like Adrienne (2008) have greater acceptance of input-based legitimacy metrics than output-based ones [43]. Also, the relatively modest outcomes of the UN Civil Society electoral framework (2023) observed at this juncture can be attributed to well-established political foundations within the local governments of European nations, in contrast to their African counterparts [44]. This is because the nature, forms, and process of legitimacy, and the legitimation of a political system does not lead to an improvement in the material interests of those who are subordinate, nor does it necessarily make the order of authority more agreeable as perceived in African politics. However, arguably, it is beneficial for individuals to conform to standards that align with their fundamental beliefs without compromising them. In a position of authority, it is not necessary for the party being commanded to agree with or perceive the order as morally justifiable. In contrast, held (2006), argued that exercising power in elections, perpetuates the

marginalisation of the populace and disadvantaged individuals [45]. The compliance of individuals who lack power is contingent upon their implicit acceptance and adherence to the demands imposed by individuals in positions of authority. Once assembly members are elected, they would commence the implementation of their legislation or undertake the removal of previous incumbents from positions of influence in the event of a decline or inadequacy of power. However, it is beneficial for individuals to adhere to laws and societal norms that align with their fundamental values without compromising them.

Moreover, the intriguing aspect of communist dictatorships (as well as other forms of governance) lies in their inability to address the challenge of succession effectively. Further the above concept, the researcher draws from Simons (1996) observations of United States Feminist Rights -Gender Framework (FGF) to explain how the various harsh political environment controls gender dynamics of electoral legitimacy practice. It looks to understand how gender representations can shape electoral rules, processes, and outcomes. This is because the feminisation of leadership encompasses FGF as an analytical tool to examine relationships between gender, power, and the environment [46].

Paradoxically, male power can interact to control resources and the environment. Since women are treated less favourably than the male gender in the electoral process because the latter is thought to have a protected characteristic or associated with someone with some protected characteristics. The interaction between gender and culture is evidenced in how the two traditional genders are classified as discrete entities, one group domesticated and traditionally assigned caring roles and the other adopting overarching positions of employment and governance. Thus, it could be argued that assigned gender predetermines the dominance of males within leadership structures and underpins women's underrepresentation within such

enclaves. Ultimately, this is, in essence, a form of patriarchal leadership with an implicit agenda of silencing feminisation (women's composition), as women's voices are implicitly suppressed and rarely heard. This explains why the gender debate is rarely heard when directed at senior women elevated to management positions, focusing on their leadership styles. Defeminisation and feminisation thus become a rhetorical extension of the machismo culture of making a system work well for men whilst being almost impossible to traverse for women to maintain extant leadership structures.

According to Huntington, (1968) in the process of feminisation, these same women must make difficult choices between getting married or staying single and having children or being successful within the professional realm. Thus, the woman has to choose between prioritising her political career ambitions at the expense of her social and private relationships. It is not, therefore, hard to understand why women exhibit defeminisation traits to agree with the Huntington (1968) "machismo" culture of politics [47]. Those who undertake this pattern in politics are workaholics with no dependants or any social life, a price they accept as worth paying for political and material advancement. Scholars Kark, and Zion-Waldoks, (2016) further discussed lack of experience amongst women in terms of higher team management, international involvement, language, operational experience, political mentoring, and the boardroom, all of which are considered essential at the entry-level into elections for both the process of feminisation and for leadership [48]. This led to support for the theory of feminisation being fragile owing to a high-pressure culture that tends to seek to assign blame.

The trio scholars further explained how, sandwiched between the traditional machismo culture and economic systems, management models of gendered interest are created and run by professionals primarily detached from equality issues [48b]. While Lewis, P and Simpson, R. (2010) summarised the paradigm

shift towards a post-feminist discourse made difficult by a refusal to participate in social change [49]. In political parties, women are marginalised by the ‘politics of money’ and the nature of women’s behaviour. Suffice it to say that all prevailing theories of relevance to the nature of feminisation facilitate a multi-faceted approach to the underrepresentation of women within elections by political parties. Hence, developing essential leadership and political rationale would, in essence, drive how such skills are deployed to some specific areas within electoral structures.

These findings are consistent with the existing research on electoral legitimacy and gender representation. Other studies have also highlighted the challenges faced by women in politics, emphasising the patriarchal nature of leadership structures and the influence of cultural norms on women’s participation. The results of this research further reinforce and substantiate these findings, contributing to a growing understanding of the intricate dynamics that shape gender representation barriers in Nigeria.

While the results offer significant insights, they also raise important questions and areas for further research. Future studies could delve deeper into the barriers women encounter in Nigerian elections, examining factors such as political financing, societal expectations, and cultural norms. By understanding these barriers more comprehensively, researchers can identify strategies and interventions to mitigate their impact and promote gender equality in political representation.

Furthermore, comparative studies across different countries or regions can provide valuable insights and inform best practices for promoting gender equality and enhancing electoral legitimacy. By examining women’s experiences in politics in diverse contexts, researchers can identify successful strategies and approaches that can be adapted and applied to the Nigerian context. Lastly, future research should assess the impact of specific policy

interventions and electoral reforms on gender representation and legitimacy. Evaluating the effectiveness of measures such as quota systems, capacity-building programs, and affirmative action policies can help identify successful strategies and inform evidence-based policy recommendations to address gender representation barriers. According to the UK report of the (2013) Constitutional review, the Electoral Act explicitly ignored gender equality as a fundamental right. In other words, the Constitution has not provided any affirmative action or quotas for women in political representation [50]. It is debatable whether the legal documents included steps to ensure that women would have 50% representation throughout public life. Importantly, the constitution contains few mechanisms to guarantee that all eligible voters were registered and able to cast ballots. Furthermore, report of Nigerian Constitution Review in 2022 does not provide viable methods to ensure that votes are counted accurately or electoral process free and fair [51]. The document lacuna explicitly relegates gender equality as a fundamental right to provide any affirmative action or quotas for women in political representation. In this effect, the recent UN Conference (2023) on women status recalled the type of patriarchy Language in Nigerian Constitution, which exposed the gap on gender equity in many areas as the word “woman” only occurs twice in the Constitution (1999); Sections 26 (2) (a) and 29 (4) (b). However, the pronoun “he” is used 235 times throughout the document [52].

## **Conclusion**

This research has explored the barriers and practices that hinder gender representation in Nigerian elections and their implications for electoral legitimacy. The findings shed light on the coercive nature of electoral processes, the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, and the influence of cultural norms and power dynamics on gender dynamics in politics. The results have contributed to a deeper

understanding of the complexities surrounding gender representation barriers and their impact on Nigeria's electoral system's legitimacy.

The research highlighted the need for comprehensive strategies to address gender representation barriers and promote equal political participation. It emphasizes the importance of challenging patriarchal leadership structures, cultural norms, and power imbalances that marginalize and silence women in the political sphere. The findings underscore the significance of creating an inclusive and equitable electoral environment that allows for the full participation of women in decision-making processes.

Furthermore, the research has revealed limited empirical evidence supporting the notion that elections alone contribute to the legitimacy of leaders or autocrats. It emphasizes the coercive nature of electoral processes and the need for power dynamics to be examined critically. The findings call for a broader understanding of legitimacy beyond electoral processes, focusing on the quality of government and the capacity of elected leaders to deliver effective representation.

To advance gender equality and enhance electoral legitimacy, the research underscores the importance of policy interventions and electoral reforms. Measures such as quota systems, capacity-building programs, and affirmative action policies can promote equal opportunities for women in politics. However, further research is needed to assess the effectiveness of these measures and identify best practices tailored to the Nigerian context.

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## **Conflict of Interest**

The researcher affirms the absence of any conflicts of interest pertaining to the investigation, examination, and dissemination of this article. As a PH. D student (Year II) in the department of political science, Texila University, this is the first article attempt in partial requirements to obtain doctorate degree, from my thesis work in progress.

Therefore, the study has been performed with complete objectivity and ethical standards, and no monetary or non-monetary motives have impacted the outcomes, evaluations or deductions discussed in this manuscript. My dedication is exclusively towards attaining academic excellence and scientific accuracy while investigating legitimacy in electoral processes and gender representation within the mentioned nations and as part of the academic requirements.

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