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AN EXAMINATION OF THE CHALLENGES OF WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENT IN NIGERIA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract
Several recent studies have identified a link between challenges faced by women representatives in parliament worldwide, with Nigeria being a specific focus. However, there is limited research on literature on the challenges women encounter in Nigeria's National parliament, particularly in the last five years from 2020-2025. Methodology and Methods: The study uses a qualitative research design. Data collection is secondary, involving gathering opinions from informants through textual statements obtained from reviewing previous scholarly articles. A content analysis strategy was employed for data analysis, aligning with the research question and increasing variation among informants. Results: Five themes (major findings) emerged from the analysis, and informants revealed that the challenges faced by women representatives in Nigeria include Pervasive Patriarchy and Cultural and religious Norms Against Women, underrepresentation and gender imbalances, an intractable notion among Nigerians about women politicians as outliers, cases of sexual harassment, limited influence on policy, amongst others.

Conclusions: Women in parliament feel insecure and inferior, influenced by societal and cultural stigma that deems women as subordinate to men. They encounter challenges in gaining support for bills they sponsored in the Assembly. Overall support for female parliamentarians will improve their inclusion in parliamentary matters.. Recommendations: The International Parliamentary Union's affirmative recommendation of reserving 30 percent

of seats for women in all national parliamentary elections should be upheld in Nigeria to give women candidates the opportunity to compete and fill their vacancies in the election. This measures if constitutionally backed-up will not only enhance women's representation in the National parliament, but it will adequately improve the scaling through of feminism-related bills.

Keywords: Challenges, Women Representatives, Parliaments in Nigeria, A Qualitative Study

Introduction

Women representatives in parliaments is a global issue that has become a world-wide posing a great political debate among scholars. While the implementation of global benchmark set by Inter-parliamentary Union is being pursued vigourously by some countries, others are reluctant to implement it. Over the past twenty years, the number of women in politics worldwide has increased, reaching the highest percentage of women in national parliaments (Orji, Orji & Agbanyim, 2018). As of January 1, 2025, empirical evidence from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women shows that globally, women members of Parliament comprise 27.2% (UN Women, 2025). Similarly, research from UN Women (2026) indicates that as of March 11, 2026, women parliamentarians worldwide make up 27.4%, a slight increase of 0.02% from the 2025 global figure. As of March 11, 2026, data from UN Women (2025) shows that 27.4% of global women members still fall 2.6% short of the international benchmark set by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)'s 2015 initiative, which aimed for 30% representation of women in the parliaments of sovereign nations globally (IPU, 2015). Although other scholarly evidence states that as of January 1, 2026, women holding national parliamentary seats worldwide are at 27.5%, slightly higher than 27.2% in 2025 and 2024, representing a 0.3% increase from 2024 to 2026 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, Press release, 2026). According to the report, this rate reflects the slowest growth from 2017 to the second consecutive year (Inter- Parliamentary Union, Press release, 2026).

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Data obtained worldwide shows that the Americas has 36.1% of elected members of parliament in its 20 chambers across 13 countries that held elections in 2025 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, Press release, 2026). As of January 2026, 35.6% of parliamentarians are women overall Inter- Parliamentary Union, Press release, 2026. Additionally, four out of

seven countries have achieved parity or more women than men in their parliaments, including Cuba, Bolivia, and Mexico. Others are Andorra, the United Arab Emirates, and Rwanda (Inter- Parliamentary Union, Press release, 2026).

In 2025, Kyrgyzstan, among the countries that engage in parliamentary renewal, recorded a 12.9 percentage point increase in the number of women in Parliament, closely followed by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines with a +12.3 percentage point's increase, while Saint Lucia took the lead close to Grenadines with a +9.1 percentage points increase (Inter- Parliamentary Union, Press release, 2026)

It has been argued that the basic fundamental truth of encouraging parity of women to men in parliament remains the quota system. This has been adopted by a few countries, particularly in Ecuador and Kyrgyzstan, in 2025, where a legislated voluntary quota resulted in an average of 30.9% in chambers, comparable to 23.3% of women representation without the application of the quota (Inter- Parliamentary Union, Press release, 2026). In 2025, in Ecuador in particular, women representatives attained 45% of the total parliamentarians elected into the chambers (Inter- Parliamentary Union, Press release, 2026)

A remarkable record of women's representation in parliament was broken in 2025 in Australia, with women securing 69 out of 150 seats, amounting to an impressive 46% (Inter-Parliamentary Union, Press release, 2026). Another remarkable achievement in women's representation occurred in Czechia, with 67 elected out of 200 elected members of the Lower Chamber representing one-third of the members of parliament, an all-time higher than before, and after the 50 women elected in 2021 (Inter- Parliamentary Union, Press release, 2026). Japan also followed suit with a women being elected Prime Minister and after the 2025 election, women numerical representation in the upper chamber rose to 29.4% (Inter-Parliamentary Union, Press release, 2026)

In contrast, by 2025 Middle East and North Africa recorded 16.2% of women parliamentarians with Tuvalu, Oman and Yemen having no single woman in their lower chambers (Inter- Parliamentary Union, Press release, 2026)

In 1995, women parliamentarians in Africa were well below thirty percent in both their lower and upper legislative chambers; however, by 2015, twelve out of the 54 countries elected more than 30 percent of women to their legislative bodies, and five countries elected more than 40 percent, with Rwanda alone electing over 60 percent (IPU, 2015). It could be revealed here that:

> Since 2003, Rwanda has held the record for the highest female legislative representation in the world, surpassing the Nordic countries (Tripp, 2003 cited in Orji, Orji, & Agbanyim, 2018 P4).

A staking revelation also reveals that:

> "Four of the world's top 10 countries, in terms of women's share of single or lower house of parliament, are in Sub-Saharan Africa: Rwanda, Seychelles, Senegal, and South Africa." (Orji, Orji & Agbanyim, 2018, P4).

In 2026 first quarter, it was revealed that women parliamentarians in Africa stands at 26% overall (Vocal Africa, 2026)

Despite the attainment of significant strides in the numerical increase of women in parliaments across Africa in the last two years, some African countries, particularly Nigeria,

have since 1999 continued to record a dwindling numerical strength of women parliamentarians despite having conducted seven consecutive parliamentary elections (Orji, Orji & Agbanyim, 2018). As shown by Orji, Orji & Agbanyim, (2018), the percentage of women representation in the Nigerian House of Representatives since 1999 to date is 3.4 percent in 1999, 4.9 in 2003 and 7.0 percent in 2007, 6.8 percent in 2011 and a further decline to 5.6 in 2015

Table 1: Women in Nigerian Parliament 1999-2011

World Rnking	House of Representatives				The Senate			
	Elections	Seats	Women	%	Elections	Seats	Women	%
104	02 1999	360	12	3.4	02 1999	109	3	2.8
107	04 2023	360	17	4.9	04 2023	109	3	2.8
117	04 2007	360	25	7.0	04 2007	109	9	8.3
125	04 2011	360	24	6.8	04 2011	109	7	6.4
181	03 2015	360	20	5.6	03 2015	109	7	6.5

Source: Re-arranged from Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women in National Parliaments" cited in Orji, Orji & Agbanyim, (2018:5).

Table 2. Gender Representation in the Senate and House of Representatives from 1999-2019

	Senate					House of Representatives				
Election Year	**No of Seats**	**Men**	**%**	**Women**	**%**	**Seats**	**Men**	**%**	**Women**	**%**
1999	109	106	97.2	3	2.8	360	347	96.4	13	3.6
2003	109	105	96.3	4	3.7	360	339	94.2	21	5.8
2007	109	100	91.7	9	8.3	360	333	92.5	27	7.5
2011	109	102	93.5	7	6.5	360	335	93.1	25	6.9
2015	109	102	93.5	7	6.5	360	338	94	22	6
2019	109	102	93.5	7	6.5	360	350	97.2	10	2.7

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2017

Table 3: Women in Nigerian Parliament 2019 and 2023

House of Representatives				The Senate			
Elections	Seats	Women	%	Elections	Seats	Women	%
23/02/2019	360	11	4.2	23/02/2019	109	8	2.7
23/02/2023	360	11	4.2	23/02/2023	109	8	2.7

Source: Culled from the INEC Website and other documents by the Researchers.

From table 3, it is asserted that the percentage in the 10th Assembly is 19, with 11 for the House of Representatives of 4.2% and 2.7% for the Senate

The representation of women in the National Assembly has been poor since 1999, with only 157 women elected over 24 years. This results in an average of approximately 22.43% if 157 is divided by 7. The figure clearly reflects an abysmal level of women's representation in Nigeria's National Parliament, considering that the Senate is made up of 109 members multiplied by the seven electoral cycles of 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023, as well as the 360 House of Representatives members during the same period.

It is clear from the data presented across the seven (7) National Assembly elections from 1999 to the present that there is a consistent decline in the number of women's national parliamentarians in Nigeria, compared to the steady increase in countries like Rwanda, Seychelles, Senegal, and South Africa. This trend motivated and shaped the development of this study, which explores the challenges faced by women representatives in Nigerian parliaments.

Problem Statement

While the IPU (International Parliamentary Union, 2015) set a target of 30 percent for women in national parliamentary seats, Nigeria has yet to reach any significant progress toward this benchmark or implement measures to do so. This is in contrast to at least four African countries—Rwanda, Seychelles, Senegal, and South Africa—that have successfully met the IPU benchmark.

Nigeria's failure as a sovereign state to achieve its target for women's representation in parliament not only fosters gender discrimination and imbalance but also prevents women from demonstrating their initiatives and talents in national decision-making. Furthermore, in this context, it is recognized by Orji, Orji & Agbanyim (2018, p. 5) that:

> The lack of progress in women's poor political representation in Nigeria is surprising, given that women's roles in the country's socio-economic and cultural landscape seem to be expanding. It is expected that this growing role would lead to greater inclusion of women in the political process.

As a result, female parliamentary representation has been declining, with the number of women in parliament reaching a peak of 25 in 2003. This was followed by a sharp drop in 2023 to levels similar to those in 1999, especially in the Senate. This is despite Nigeria being a signatory to Inter-Parliamentary Union on 35% Affirmative agreement, UN women under the united Nations coupled with being the so-called Giant of Africa, its ranking in female parliamentary representation remains very poor compared to other African countries.

In fact, a study by Eke (2022) has shown that women's insufficient representation in the National Assembly has negatively affected the promotion and enforcement of women's rights. For example, the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill was rejected during its second reading in the National Assembly on March 16, 2016, possibly because only 7 women were among the 109 senators. Additionally, there is a clear case of gender inequality in the National Assembly due to poor representation of women parliamentarians (Eke (2022). Thirdly, the inadequate representation of women in the National Assembly poses serious challenges to women in Nigeria, both in general and in the National Assembly in particular.

While the major source of challenges of women parliamentarians in Nigeria may be low numerical strength, there is the need for further investigation hence, the need for the study. Therefore, the study is examining the challenges of women representatives in parliament in Nigeria using Qualitative study to undertake the research.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the challenges faced by women in the Nigerian National Parliament from 2019 to 2025. In light of this, the following research question was developed to guide the study.

Research Question

What are the Challenges facing women Parliamentarians in Nigeria's National Assembly?

Research Objective

i. The specific objective of the present study is to examine the Challenges facing women Parliamentarians in Nigeria's National Assembly. State of the Research and Novelty of the Study from the Gap in the Literature

Though the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) released official findings in 2025 regarding some violence against women parliamentarians, with 76% of women in parliaments reporting facing psychological violence around the world, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, Africa, and European regions. Though these instances of psychological violence against women parliamentarians revealed by the IPU around the world, including Nigeria, may be a challenge to women parliamentarians in line with the present study, the IPU failed to unveil the factors of psychological violence. Secondly, Stand to End Rape (2024), a women advocacy initiative against women raping also, also examines "barriers to entry: understanding the challenges faced by women in Nigerian politics. The study examined challenges faced by women but focused on politics in general and not specific to women parliamentarians. Third, George, Adetunde, Ijagbemi & Udum (2016) examine overcoming challenges of women in politics from Nigeria perspective. This study is also not the same as the present study. Fourth, Adejo (2022) also discusses the challenges of women in Politics which made it different from the present study. Fifth, "Giving Voice to the Voiceless: The Challenges of Women Legislators in Nigeria's National Assembly" is a research paper by Ajodo-Adebanjoko (2021). The paper is centred on the advantages and challenges of representation and leadership of Women in Nigeria National legislature. Though very closely related to the present study, the literature differs, the methodology also differs, and the present study is subject-specific, with direct quotations from scholars who are chosen as informants.

In light of this gap in the literature, coupled with the fact that only 20 women out of 469 (Channel Television, 2025) are in the National Legislative House as at 2025 (Channel Television, 2025), there is a need to examine the challenges facing women parliamentarians in Nigeria's National Assembly.

Theoretical Framework

There are four Theories used for the study namely, Liberal Feminist Theory, descriptive, substantive, and proportional. The academic reason for the combination of the four theories is centred on the inability of a single theory to fully guide the present study titled "An Examination of the Challenges of Women Representatives in National Parliament in Nigeria

For instance, theory is gender equality to be achieved through political and legal change under the context of democratic structures, substantive representation theory empowers women to advocate for women's interests, proportional representation instead of majoritarian systems is also essential as it is considered more effective at electing women than a majoritarian system descriptive theory of women's representation highlights how well a legislature reflects the democratic population it serves. Therefore, the four theories strengthens the present study as a single theory out of the four is not capable or possesses the basic ingredients to guide the objective of the study.

Liberal Feminist Theory

Liberal feminism, a foundational, reform-oriented theory is credited to Mary Wollstonecraft and Susan B. Anthony, an activist who fought for suffrage. The main focus of the theory is gender equality to be achieved through political and legal change under the context of democratic structures.

Main assumption of the theory include:

i. Individual autonomy
ii. Education
iii. Equal rights
iv. Removal of barriers against women in public spheres, particularly in employment discrimination and lack of sufferage

The core philosophy of liberal Feminism theory is heavily hinged on the believe of equality of men and women as rational beings. To the liberal Feminism theorists, equality strongly advocates that men and women be given to share the same right. Therefore, by implication and extension, women should be given equal right with men politically, economically, socially and otherwise.

Therefore, Liberal feminism theory emphasizes on the promotion of a reform capable of improving the lives of women through equality in education, pay combating violence against women and also in productive rights.

The main methodology used for achieving Liberal Feminism include working within the system rather than overturning the system and the employment and utilization of lobbying, using legislation and using legal reforms not only to enhance but to ensure equality

In fact, Liberal feminism targets the removal of unfair barriers as the theory did see patriarchy as a systemic issue instead of a threat.

Three other theories in conjunction with the Liberal Feminist theory are used in this study: The theories are Descriptive, substantive, and proportional. These theories focus on women's representation in parliament. Scholars have developed the descriptive and substantive theories to identify key causal explanations for the impacts and variations of women's representation in parliament.

The descriptive theory of women's representation highlights how well a legislature reflects the democratic population it serves. Therefore, achieving descriptive representation requires that the number of female parliamentarians corresponds to the proportion of women in the population.

In other words, this theory emphasizes the importance of a legislature's composition mirroring the population's diversity, especially regarding women. Therefore, by the tenets of the theory, including women in office is valuable in itself because it provides role models and can enhance the government's legitimacy among female citizens. For example, if a country's parliament has 20% or more women that counts as descriptive representation because there will be more women in parliament to support women cause. The argument supporting the explanatory theory of women's representation is that once a 'Critical Mass' is reached in parliament, it becomes essential to legitimize democratic decisions that serve as role models for other women. Additionally, theories about women's representation in parliament mainly focus on removing institutional barriers, addressing political cultures, and tackling other socio-economic factors to create opportunities for targeted interventions, such as electoral system reforms and quota adoption, to fight systemic underrepresentation. Moreover, it is argued that descriptive representation highlights the importance of women's presence in bringing diverse perspectives to parliament.

Secondly, there is also a need to promote substantive representation to empower women to advocate for women's interests. This theory argues that the main measure of women's representation is their influence on policy and the political agenda. It is about whether women representatives support and pass legislation that addresses women's specific needs and promotes gender equality. For example, an increase in the number of women legislators leading to the passage of more laws on issues such as parental leave, childcare, or combating domestic violence demonstrates substantive representation.

Third, adopting proportional representation instead of majoritarian systems is also essential. This method is considered more effective at electing women than a majoritarian system. Proportional Representation allows party lists, encouraging parties to include more women to broaden their appeal, thereby increasing the number of women elected. Proportional Representation systems aim to distribute legislative seats proportionally to the votes each party receives. Multi-member districts are common. These systems tend to favour women's representation because it is easier to elect women through party lists and quota systems, particularly with multiple-member constituencies.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework for the Study



Source: Researchers' Theoretical Framework Flowchart for the Study of Challenges of Women Parliamentarians in Nigeria's National Assembly

Methodology and Methods

The study employs a qualitative research design and the source of data collection is secondary while the method of data collection is quotes from literature related to the study. Sampling technique used to select the quotes is Purposive Sampling Technique.

Studies acknowledge that quotations serve several purposes in qualitative research which include illustrating findings, offering readers vicarious experiences, explaining, impressing, and more importantly, offering readers vicarious experiences, and supporting claims (Yeo & Han, 2025). Additionally, quotations in qualitative research are used to impress or represent (Eldh et al., 2020).

The primary aim of using the Purposive sampling technique to select quotations from literature is premised on the ground that the goal is not to have random sampling of quotes from literature but to purposely select only the "information-rich" quotes that are capable of explaining and providing illumination for the findings of the research, as well as the themes and the theoretical interpretations (Yeo & Hans, 2025). While there are three major types of purposive quote selection namely, typical case, deviant/extreme case, confirming/disconfirming, the typical case is adopted by this research. The purposive quote selection typical case is defined as the quote that represent the average common and or experience.

Therefore, the present study used the purposive quote selection, typical case to adopt quotations from the literature from most suitable authors' work that is related to the study as a method of data collection and analysis for the present study. The quotations representing views of individuals selected by the researchers are those views that represents the live experience of the scholars (literature informants) from the documents that the present researchers felt are within the frame of the related studies that are useful and related to the study. The purposive quote selection typical case are those quotations that are capable of producing the themes that generated the themes of the study that produced the findings that invariably answer the research question and represented the objective of the study.

Therefore, data collection and analysis was obtained from Quotations were generated from the following scholars and authors, organizations namely, Jumai Ahmadu , Eke, B.O. (2022), Asmau Isyaku Dutse, Nkereuwem (2023, Ogundapo, A. (2025), Nunieh (2020), Adamu, 2023, Udoh et al. (2025), Eke, 2022; Vincent-Orugbo, 2022; Kartay, 2025, Amadi & Anaba, 2021; Burgess (2021), Ikonne & Isaac, 2023:16, National Democratic Institute (NDI, 2019 cited in Ikonne & Isaac, 2023, National Bureau of Statistics, 2016 cited in Ikonne & Isaac, (2023, Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi, 2025, Yeo & Hans, Adabembe (2025), Inter Parliamentary Union, 2015, Inter Parliamentary Union, 2021, Inter Parliamentary Union 2026 accordingly.

Examination of the Challenges of Women Representatives in Parliaments in Nigeria: a Qualitative Study

There are packages of challenges being faced by women representatives in Nigeria's National Assembly over the years, especially from 1999 to date. Several scholars have presented their arguments in this regard.

Pervasive Patriarchy and Cultural and Religious Norms against Women: A Challenge to Women Parliamentarians in Nigeria's National Assembly

It was revealed by a woman scholar that "*Women in Nigeria are often seen as inferior to men and are discriminated against in many ways. This is due to the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society- a significant feature of traditional Nigerian culture" (Ikonne & Isaac, 2023:16).*

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2021) also notes "*that women's representation in the Nigerian National Assembly remains significantly below the global average. This underrepresentation hampers efforts to address gender bias and implement inclusive policies". This revelation by IPU was the result of the failure of "The Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill"*, for instance, that faced significant resistance, reflecting a reluctance to address gender bias and dismantle patriarchal structures.
Similarly, Ahmadu (2025) add that:

> *Serving women senators in the Nigerian Senate face challenges, including pervasive patriarchy and cultural norms that question women's political participation, along with institutional and socio-economic barriers. They also experience a disproportionate share of political struggles, such as being marginalized, facing silencing tactics, and experiencing gender-based violence, as seen in the recent case of Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan's suspension*.

Similarly,

> *The underrepresentation of women in political positions is glaring. Despite women constituting about 49.5% of the population (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016 cited in Ikonne & Isaac, (2023), they hold a minute percentage of political offices. National Democratic Institute (NDI, 2019 cited in Ikonne & Isaac, 2023) reveals that women held only 4.8% of seats in Nigeria's National Assembly in 2019. This stark gender disparity in political representation raises important questions about the underlying causes and consequences of patriarchy in Nigerian politics. The low level of inclusion of women in political decision-making processes can be attributed to several factors, such as traditional cultural norms and gender roles that continue to assign women to domestic spheres, limiting their opportunities for political engagement* (Ikonne & Isaac, 2023:16).

It is also acknowledged that:

> a. *Societal norms are still an obstruction to women's rights in Nigeria. Bias in political spheres aimed at discouraging women's inclusion and political participation b. Double standards are employed in dealing with male and female politicians c. The 'divide and rule' method is being employed by male politicians against women politicians. d. Nigerian women still have a long way to go in order to secure their rightful places and positions in elective and appointive positions ((Ikonne & Isaac, 2023:16).*

Similarly:

> *a. Societal norms are still an obstruction to women's rights in Nigeria. Bias in political spheres aimed at discouraging women's inclusion and political participation b. Double standards are employed in dealing with male and female politicians. The 'divide and rule' method is being employed by male politicians against women politicians. d. Nigerian women still have a long way to go inorder to secure their rightful places and positions in elective and appointive positions (Adebembe, 2025:3153)*

The suspension lasted for a period of six months, and the argument for the suspension was given in five-fold:

> Secondly, she was not permitted to talk by the Senate Presiding Officer. "The rule she was accused of violating requires a senator to speak on the floor of the House only from their designated seat" (Adambebe, 2025:3152)

Third, that she disturbed the Senate proceedings

Fourth, that she abused and disrespected Senate Leadership through the statement she made

Fifth, she ignored her summons by the Senate Committee on Ethics and Privileges to appear before it to present her justification for her action

Furthermore, Jumai Ahmadu in 2025 adds that:

> Senator Akpoti, who was suspended from parliament by the Senate President, is just one out of similar cases in the recent past. Sen. Ireti Kingibe and Sen. Remi Tinubu (now First Lady) all had bitter experiences in the upper chamber.

This is to say that apart from Senator Natasha Akpoti, Senator Ireti Kingibe and Senator Remi Tinubu (now First Lady of Nigeria) suffered a similar fate

Also, Eke, B.O. (2022), in her Dissertation acknowledged that:

> *Women's insufficient representation in the National Assembly has negatively affected the promotion and enforcement of women's rights. For example, the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill was rejected during its second reading in the National Assembly on March 16, 2016, possibly because only 7 women were among the 109 senators. Additionally, there is a clear case of gender inequality in the National Assembly due to the poor representation of women parliamentarians*

Eke's revelation is also a testimony that there is marginalization of Women in the National Assembly of Nigeria due to the low numerical strength of women in the National Assembly

In addition, Jumai Ahmadu, in 2025, in the This Day online newspaper edition, laments that:

> *It is thus significant to note that the cumulative percentage of women in the two chambers of Nigeria's 10th National Assembly is below 5%. It is also important to note that no woman was elected in 15 out of Nigeria's 36 State Houses of Assembly following the state-level general elections in March 2023*

Jumai Ahmadu, in 2025, the This Day online newspaper edition, further reveals strikingly that:

> *The Temporary Special Measures bill, with more than 80 other House of Representatives members co-sponsoring it, was debated but failed to pass in the 9th Assembly*

Again, it is noted by Jumai Ahmadu in 2025 in This Day online newspaper edition and supported that:

> *Structural biases and barriers to women's political participation indicate that the few women who show active interest in politics are discouraged by factors that include prevailing gender stereotypes, cultural/religious reasons, unfavourable political environment, lack of financial capacity, electoral violence, and restrictive party structures and processes, amongst others.*

In a related development, Jumai Ahmadu in 2025 in This Day online newspaper edition and others have disclosed also that:

> *Political hurdles, socio-cultural issues such as patriarchy, religious dogma, and conventional views of women in politics, and socio-economic hurdles such as low income, lack of resources, electoral processes, and political party structures, have all been identified as barriers to women's political engagement.*

Dutse (2025) & Adedokun (2021 also argued that:

> *Persistent structural and systemic barriers continue to hinder their political engagement (Dutse, 2025).*
> *Cultural factors deeply rooted in patriarchy and traditional gender roles continue to be significant barriers to women's political participation. Patriarchal beliefs and practices, such as early marriage, polygamy, and societal expectations of domesticity, place women in subordinate roles within both the family and the community, restricting their agency. These cultural norms are further reinforced by religious beliefs that often intersect with traditional practices, intensifying the difficulties women face in pursuing political ambitions* (Adedokun, 2021).

The cultural factor, religious inclination, and traditional gender roles are major barriers to women's representation in Nigeria's National Assembly, as these factors deny women many opportunities. Therefore, the same societal barriers extend to Nigeria's national parliament. In fact, some traditional and religious interpretations in parts of Nigeria hold that women should not be involved in politics, viewing it as a masculine endeavour. This creates an environment where women are often ignored or considered passive participants in the political process

Significant challenges faced by female legislators in Nigeria's Senate include gender imbalance and underrepresentation, male-dominated political structures, cultural and religious barriers, lack of financial resources and support, and violence. These challenges are intensified by political and party systems that have historically marginalized women, resulting in their exclusion from leadership roles and limited influence on policy-making.

In the light of the aforementioned revelations, we could group challenges of women in the Nigerian National parliament to include underrepresentation and gender imbalance, cultural and religious barriers, financial constraints, lack of institutional and party support, violence and security concerns, and lastly, limited influence on policy.

Underrepresentation and Gender Imbalances: A Challenge to Women in Nigerian Parliament

Noted by Nkereuwem (2023) with dismay:

> *the number of women in Nigeria's National Assembly has dropped by19 percent compared to the 9th assembly, with women now occupying 3 percent of seats at the Senate and 4 percent of seats at the House of Representatives*

Dutse (2025) also agreed with Nkereuwem (2023) stating that:

> *Despite global and national efforts to promote gender inclusivity, women in Nigeria remain significantly underrepresented in political leadership and decision-making roles*

Nkereuwem's Dutse's observation is important because Nigeria has consistently had very few female legislators in the National Assembly compared to their male counterparts.

Women occupy a very small percentage of seats in the Assembly. The recent 9th Assembly had only 21 female members out of 469, representing 4.48% only, and the 8th Assembly had just 29, which is just 6.18%. The figures is showing a heavy bias toward male representation. Since decisions are made through democratic voting, men with higher representation tend to win decisions against women. As a result, the underrepresentation of women in Nigeria's National Assembly comes from the democratic voting process, so unless more women are elected, there is no clear solution.

Intractable notion among Nigerians about Women Politicians as Outliers

Asmau Isyaku Dutse (2025) once again raises a notable point that has a negative link to the challenges being faced by women in Nigeria's National Assembly. She reveals in herstudy that:

> *Not only are women relatively invisible in the political landscape, but there remains an intractable notion among Nigerians, including women themselves, that politics is male territory, and women who venture into it are 'outliers'. The persistence of this idea after five cycles of elections compels an examination of the socio-cultural and institutional apparatus that sustains it and the strategies adopted by the 'outliers' to negotiate access to the political space.*

The consequence of this societal belief may be linked to women's inability to be vibrant in the National Assembly, which calls for further empirical research to unravel the genuineness of the claim

Cases of Sexual harassment: A bane to Women in the National Assembly

Sexual harassment has been described as a persistent issue within the National Assembly, where a lack of women's representation in government can create an environment where allegations are taken lightly

Another fundamental challenge facing women in Nigeria's National Assembly is sexual harassment, with the latest being Senator Natasha's accusation against Senate President, Godswill Akpabio. In March 2025, a case of alleged sexual harassment involving Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan and the Senate Leadership was discussed, leading to calls for a transparent investigation.

Ogundapo, A. (2025) in Premium Times Newspaper Edition of 28 February, 2025, in a caption "Updated: Natasha accuses Akpabio of sexual harassment" revealed that:

> *Kogi Central Senator, Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, has accused the Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, of sexual harassment. Mrs Akpoti-Uduaghan, a member of the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), made the allegation during an interview with Arise Television on Friday. The senator detailed an incident from 8 December 2023, when she and her husband visited Mr Akpabio's residence in Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom State.*
>
> *During the visit, she alleged that the senate president held her hand, led her around his house, and then made inappropriate advances towards her, even in her husband's presence.*
>
> *"It all started on the 8th of December, 2023, which was a day before his birthday and my birthday. We are birthday mates. We were all in Akwa Ibom, because he had a big fanfare in the*

> *stadium, myself, my husband, and a few of his close friends, we went to Akwa Ibom.*
> *"At first, we were at Ikot Ekpene, his house in Ikot Ekpene, then we all moved to his house in Uyo, which was about 8 p.m., and he held my hand, and said he wanted to show me around his house. My husband was walking behind us, just three of us, walking around from room to room.*
> *"He showed me the beautiful interior. This was done by this, by that, this designer here, he bought this from us, look how beautiful it is, and then I noticed that he hastened his pace while still holding my hand. My husband was behind, still on his phone, but he was catching up whenever he could. And then he got to this particular sitting room, and he said, "do you like my house?' I said, of course, sir.*
> *"Every room, beautiful, nice interior, quality taste. He said, 'now that you're a senator, I'm going to create time for us to come spend quality moments here. You will enjoy it.' At that point, I just pulled away, and I was like, I don't really understand what exactly that meant," she narrated.*

While it is not for this study to investigate or unravel the sexual harassment saga in the National Assembly of Nigeria, because it was denied by Mr. Akpabio coupled with the fact that the case was not proved right by any competent court of law in Nigeria or elsewhere, the cases of sexual harassment however, has been mentioned in Nigeria's National Assembly.
The situation has highlighted the need for strong policies and enforcement to address sexual harassment in the workplace, including in public institutions like the National Assembly. The absence of specific, documented cases from earlier periods is often linked to a systemic culture that may encourage women to remain silent out of fear of retaliation and stigmatization. Consequently, women may feel intimidated and afraid to carry out their legislative duties in the National Assembly.

Limited influence on policy: A Barrier for Women in the Nigerian National Assembly
Another major challenge faced by women in Nigeria's National Assembly is their limited influence on policies. This issue stems from their low numbers and the scarcity of leadership roles, which restricts their ability to effectively shape public policies and weakens their voice within the Assembly. As a result, policies, or more precisely, government policies originating from the National Assembly, are often not gender-sensitive.
An informant has this to say:

> *Studies consistently highlight the low representation of women in Nigeria's National Assembly, where gender imbalances significantly influence policy formulation (Adamu, 2023). During the 9th National Assembly, women occupied only a small fraction of seats in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, a situation that limited their influence over policy agendas and outcomes. Udoh et al. (2025)*

Also sets of scholars observed that:

> *The limited representation of women in the 9th National Assembly has led to gender-biased policy outcomes, particularly in areas critical to women' social and economic well-being. Scholars have found that gender inequality within legislative bodies result in policies that fail to address issues affecting women adequately, such as gender-based*

> *violence, maternal health, and economic empowerment (Eke, 2022; Vincent-Orugbo, 2022; Kartay, 2025*

Even though in line with Amadi & Anaba, 2021; Burgess (2021) argues that:

> *Male legislators may lack the lived experiences necessary to understand the challenges women face, leading to policies that do not fully address gender-specific needs*

Findings

Five major findings emerged from the analysis based on the revelations by informants from the documentary sources that was used to reveal the challenges faced by women representatives in Nigeria's National parliament. These comprises 'The Senate and House of Representatives" include, Pervasive Patriarchy and Cultural and religious Norms Against Women, underrepresentation and gender imbalances, intractable notion among Nigerians about women politicians as outliers, cases of sexual harassment, limited influence on policy

Conclusion

The reviews of documentary information and coding and theming of texts from the scholarly articles and national dailies empirically suggest that there is challenges facing women in the Nigeria's National Assembly, comprising the Senate and House of Representatives. These include Pervasive Patriarchy and Cultural and religious Norms against Women, underrepresentation and gender imbalances, intractable notion among Nigerians about women politicians as outliers, cases of sexual harassment, and limited influence on policy. These ills has resulted in negative influence among the women parliamentarians and in particular and the Nigeria women in particular as the feminism-related bills hardly see the light of the day in the National Assembly. It is on this noted that the following recommendations becomes inevitable.

Recommendations

In line with the findings, namely Pervasive Patriarchy and Cultural and Religious Norms Against Women, underrepresentation and gender imbalances, an intractable notion among Nigerians about women politicians as outliers, cases of sexual harassment, and limited influence on policy, the present study recommends the following:

1. It recommends that the 35% affirmative action for women's representation in the parliament in Nigeria be codified into law at all levels of government to engender greater participation of women in parliament to strengthen women's numerical strength in parliament.
2. Women in parliament in governance and leadership to stand firm and continue without fear of intimidation, harassment and oppression to carry out and carry on their duties of representation of their constituencies. Women should never ever lose their voice, but rather continue to stand strong in their commitment to citizens and prove that representation matters.
3. Women should be encouraged to participate in parliamentary electoral contest particularly for the Senate and House of Representatives, so as to build their numerical strength at the Nigerian National Assembly to enhance their capacity for robust bill sponsorship and debate towards securing overwhelming or average benchmark for their bills to scale through in the national Assembly.

   Finally, Nigerian women parliamentarians should partner with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as the organization helps parliamentarians not only to become stronger, younger, and greener but also enhances gender balance, most particularly as the IPU

defends human rights of parliamentarians through a dedicated committee that is made up of members of parliaments from around the globe.

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