

Women Participation in Nigerian Politics, 1999-2015: The Ekiti State Experience

¹Professor Toyin Abe, ²Dr. Adewumi Akinjide Omoniyi

Ekiti State University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Political Science, Ekiti State, Nigeria;

Ekiti State University, Faculty of Arts, Department of Philosophy, Ado Ekiti.

ABSTRACT: The paper examines the women folks and the democratic processes and their foray into the political governance of Nigeria. It further investigates how women were downplayed despite their struggles within the polity. The paper relies on both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were based on oral interviews and archival materials. Secondary sources on the other hand, included literature such as books and newspapers. The oral interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The documentary data were subjected to internal and external criticism for authentication and then to textual and contextual analysis. The researchers find out that the female gender in Ekiti politics have not achieved optimally in the government.

KEYWORDS: Women, Gender, Politics, Democratic Processes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is inarguably the biggest country in West Africa and Africa as a whole (Duyile & Ojo, The First Republic and Democratic Governance: Intra-Ethnic Politics Prior to the Nigerian Civil War, 2020). Nigeria covers an area of 923, 768km (Duyile, Adu, Jegede, & Oluwafemi, 2020). Nigeria ranks among the weakest countries in terms of institutional quality, scoring a poor 187 out of 212 nations studied (Duyile & Olabimpe, 2019). Over the years, there has been raging debates over the participation or desire of women in Nigerian politics. Their main argument was that women are regarded as weaker vessel owing to religious ideas, social values, norms, and beliefs which have neglected their meaningful contributions and have placed them in a second fiddle position to men in the nation political system. For generations, Nigerian women have grown up to believe that their female children would be better off than the previous generation (Duyile, Nwachukwu, Ediagbonya, & Olofinbaika, 2020). Old evils of rape, polygamy, poverty and illiteracy continue to increase; new evils of terrorism and militancy had also emerged (Duyile, Nwachukwu, Ediagbonya, & Olofinbaika, 2020). From the level of women's political participation indicated that the level of women's political participation is low compared to men. This is corroborated by the findings from existing studies that there is wide gender gap in political participation in Nigeria. Moreover, women dominate politically at the level with which they play supportive roles to men rather than to be supported (Adebayo, 2008). A majority of the women also expressed that male politicians will use them for political rallies and mobilization of people to vote during elections but will not be recommended for elective and the appointed positions because they are women and women are not good as leaders (Olatunji, 2014). This is an evidence of gender stratification in political participation and the reason for this could be precipitated on sex-typed roles, a patriarchal instrument used to sustain unequal gender power and economic relations, men is assumed to be superior as leaders and business administrators. In addition, result also showed that the proportion of women that had ever vied for political positions and contested in elections was very low (Akinwunmi, 2010).

The period spanning from 1999 to 2015 witnessed a transformative journey in women's participation in Ekiti politics, reflecting their evolving roles and contributions across diverse sectors (Aisha, 2010). Notably, women left a distinct imprint within religious institutions and educational establishments, two domains where their impact was most pronounced. Over these years, the influence of women resonated deeply within Ekiti's politics, with prominent figures like Erelu Bisi Fayemi, Princess Adetutu Ogunleye, and others embodying their devotion

to leadership roles. Ekiti women also took up pivotal positions as spiritual leaders, church ministers, and active members amongst Moslem communities. Their contributions went beyond traditional roles, extending into event organization, social service provision, and charitable activities. Their reach transcended religious boundaries, fostering unity and communal development. Leveraging their positions within these institutions, these remarkable women played a pivotal role in raising political awareness and driving social change, knitting faith and politics together for the betterment of Ekiti society.

In parallel, Ekiti State University bore witness to the spirited involvement of women in politics, propelled by figures such as Senator Biodun Olujimi and Professor Princess (Mrs) Funmilayo Olayinka. While primarily its academic institution, the Ekiti State University provided a dynamic platform for women to engage in robust dialogues, debates, and events tied to political matters (Ifeoma, 2012). Their contributions had helped academic discourse and underscored the resonance between academia and societal transformation. Indirectly, their actions left an indelible mark on Ekiti's political landscape, enriching it with their ideals and aspirations. In the overarching narrative of women's participation in Ekiti politics during the specified years, the integration of women within religious institutions and educational domains presents a mosaic of multifaceted contributions (Okonkwo, 2017). Beyond the structured arenas of formal politics, these women harnessed their influence in diverse realms, molding community values, igniting change, and fostering an inclusive political ethos that reverberates throughout Ekiti State (Toyin, 2004).

Women's Empowerment and Representation in Ekiti Politics

Ekiti State has witnessed a notable shift towards women's empowerment and representation in politics as well as in the business world. Women's participation in Ekiti politics has been very weak or limited, and they were often relegated to the background in decision-making processes (Lawal, 2009). However, the growing awareness of the importance of gender equality and women's rights has spurred significant progress in changing this narrative (Okafor, 2018). Women's empowerment in Ekiti politics encompasses various aspects, including political awareness, education, leadership development, and economic opportunities. Organizations and advocacy groups dedicated to women's rights and gender equality have played a pivotal role in raising awareness about the importance of women's political participation and encouraging women to actively engage in the political process (Okonkwo, 2017).

One significant indicator of women's increasing empowerment is their rising representation in political offices and leadership positions. Over the years, more women have successfully contested and won political elections at various levels of government. This upward trend in women's representation is a testament to the gradual breaking of traditional and religious barriers and the recognition of women's potential as capable leaders and decision-makers. The government and other stakeholders have also implemented policies and initiatives to promote women's political empowerment (Olatunji, 2014). For instance, the adoption of the 35 per cent affirmative action for women in politics and governance by the state government has provided a platform for women to actively participate in politics and hold key positions in government institutions. Furthermore, the efforts of prominent women leaders, such as Erelu Bisi Fayemi, Prof. Adelabu, and Abiodun Christine Olujimi, have been instrumental in championing women's rights and creating opportunities for women's representation in politics. These women have not only held political offices but have also advocated for policies and laws that protect women's rights and address gender-based disparities.

The impact of women's empowerment and representation in Ekiti politics extends beyond political circles. Their involvement has brought about positive changes in the social fabric of the state. Women's increased political participation has challenged traditional gender norms and stereotypes, empowering women and girls to aspire to leadership roles and pursue their goals. Moreover, women's representation in decision-making bodies has led to the formulation of policies and programs that address the specific needs and concerns of women and marginalized groups. Issues such as maternal healthcare, education for girls, and economic opportunities for women have gained prominence on the political agenda, leading to targeted interventions to address these challenges.

Political cum Economic Achievement of Women in Ekiti Politics

The political achievement of women in Ekiti politics has been marked by notable figures who have risen to prominent positions and made important contributions to the state's governance. One of such remarkable figure is Abiodun Christine. She was a board member of Nigerian Communications Commission. Abiodun Christine Olujimi was born in Omuo Ekiti, Ekiti state, Her education started in Our Lady of Apostles in Ibadan, Oyo State and then proceeded to Nigerian Institute of Journalism to obtain a Diploma in 1976. Biodun Olujimi also bagged degrees in Political science and a Postgraduate degree in Public Relations and Marketing from the University of Abuja. Biodun's started her career as broadcaster and journalist. During her career as a journalist, she worked

with the Nigerian Tribune, Nigerian Posts and Telecommunication, Nigerian Television Authority, the Delta Steel Company, Ovwian Aladja, Reflex Concept, DBN Television and was the Manager of DBN TV from 1993 to 1997. She joined her husband in politics in 1997 as the National Publicity Secretary of the extinct NCPN, she moved to All Progressive Congress (APC) after the extinction of her former party, and still became the National Publicity Secretary in APC. In 2002, she joined Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and this was the beginning of her great achievements in politics. 2003 was the year she was appointed the Special Assistant to the Executive Governor of Ekiti State, from there she was elected to the Federal House of Assembly. She became the Deputy Governor of Ekiti State with Governor Ayo Fayose in 2005. Olujimi attained other great heights in politics; from being the Commissioner for Works and Infrastructure in her state to a Director of Women Affairs. In 2015, she contested for a Senatorial seat and won, and became a senator representing the Ekiti South constituency in the National Assembly under the Peoples Democratic Party.

The Peoples Democratic Party, Ekiti State chapter appointed her as the state party leader in November 2018 to strengthen the state party in preparation for the 2019 elections. In the 2019 General Elections, she initially lost her seat for representing Ekiti South to the APC candidate Prince Adedayo Clement Adeyeye. However, the State Assembly Election Tribunal and the Appeal Court later declared her winner of the Ekiti South Senatorial District. Consequently, she was sworn into the Nigerian Senate by the Senate President on 14 November 2019. In 2020, Olujimi was involved in a verbal war with the former Governor of Ekiti state Ayodele Fayose, where she accused him of manipulating the electoral process at the Ekiti state PDP ward congress. On 22 March 2021 senator Abiodun Olujimi narrated how she escaped being shot at during the violence that erupted at the House of Assembly bye-election for Ekiti East Constituency. The bye-election was to fill in the vacant position of Juwa Adegbuyi, a representative of the constituency who died in February. Olujimi, a Nigerian politician who served as the senator representing the Ekiti South constituency and held the position of the minority leader in the Nigerian Senate. Born on December 25, 1958, in Omuo Ekiti, she shattered gender barriers by increasing women's representation in political offices at various levels, advocating for policies addressing gender in equalities, and actively working to empower women and marginalized groups in her community.

Another notable figure is Prof. Adelabu, a seasoned scholar and administrator. She started her career in the Department of Educational Administration and Planning at Obafemi Awolowo University and eventually became a Professor in 2008 (Oladeji, 2011). Beyond academia, she actively participated in various organizations and consultancy work, making significant contributions to the education sector and serving as the Deputy Governor of Ekiti State, the second woman to hold this position. Prof Adelabu was born on May 23rd, 1950, in Ado Ekiti, to Prince and Mrs. Samuel Adepoju Adejugbe. She attended Christ's School, Ado-Ekiti (1962 – 1967) and Olivet Baptist High School, Oyo (1968 -1970). She holds a B.A. (Ed) (1975); MPhil (1981); and PhD (1990), all from the ObafemiAwolowo University (OAU), Ile- Ife. The princess started her teaching career as a Graduate Assistant in 1976 in the Department of Educational Administration and Planning, OAU, where she rose to the post of Professor in 2008. She served as Head of the Department of Educational Administration several times and also served as external examiner in some Universities, including the University of Ibadan; University of Lagos; University of Ilorin and Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti.

Adelabu has served as Council Member of National Teachers' Institute (2001- 2003), Council Member, Christ International Divinity College (an affiliate of Acadia University Canada) Erinmo (2005 – 2010); Member Planning and Implementation Committee Joseph Ayo Babalola University (2004- 2005); Member of Council Joseph Ayo Babalola University (2005 – 2010). She was also a foundation member of Board, Ekiti State World Bank Assisted Poverty Reduction Agency (2000 – 2003); Member of Oxford Round Table, Oxford England, among other bodies. A seasoned scholar and administrator of international repute, Prof Adelabu's major research area is on policy and personnel issues in education, including the roles of the state in education; teacher education as well poverty and gender related issues in education, particularly in rural areas. She has published over 30 articles in both national and international journals. The don and politician has been involved in consultancy work for the World Bank, Universal Basic Education Commission in Nigeria, United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) and other international agencies. She has also served as resource person for UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO on various educational issues. She was also part of the 15-member Education Reform Panel that worked on Ekiti State government's reforms in the education sector. Adelabu is the recipient of the 2013 Kwame Nkrumah Leadership Award (African Administration Icon) organized by the All- Africa Student Union (ASSU).

Adelabu became the third woman to have occupied the exalted position after Mrs Abiodun Olujimi of People's Democratic Party (PDP) who was appointed by Governor Ayo Fayose as first female Deputy in September 2005, and late Olayinka of Action Congress of Nigeria in October, 2010. In his remarks, the Speaker, Adewale Omirin, explained that the conduct of the screening at the parliamentary session was borne out of the

Lawmakers' decision. A number of factors may have worked in her favour of which was her excellent performance in her former position at SUBEB. Though, not a politician, Adelabu seemed to have learnt the game of politics faster than those he met there. She is arguably one of the most likeable faces in Fayemi's government today. Picking a politician, according to watchers of political events, might have generated bad blood among contenders and introduce political tension in the state. And more significantly, she was not one of those who lobbied for the job, as she herself has confirmed.

Furthermore, Olufunmilayo Aduni Olayinka, a banker and politician, made history as the Deputy Governor of Ekiti State. She displayed exceptional leadership and dedication throughout her career, leaving a lasting impact on the state's political landscape. These notable figures, along with others, have achieved remarkable strides in Ekiti politics, breaking barriers, advocating for women's rights, and contributing to policy formulation and implementation. Their presence in decision-making positions has led to greater political engagement among women, increased attention to gender issues, and improved representation for women's concerns in the state's governance. The political achievements of these women have not only strengthened democracy in Ekiti but also promoted gender equality, creating a more inclusive and progressive society. Their contributions have set a positive precedent for future generations of women, inspiring them to actively participate in politics and public service. Through their dedication and determination, these women have transformed Ekiti politics and paved the way for more equitable and representative governance in the state.

Olufunmilayo Aduni Olayinka, née Famuagun (20 June 1960 – 6 April 2013), was a Nigerian banker and politician who served as the deputy governor of Ekiti State. Olayinka was born in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State. She attended Holy Trinity Grammar School Ibadan, where she obtained her first school leaving certificate with distinction. She subsequently proceeded to Olivet Baptist High School, Oyo State, Nigeria, where she obtained her Higher School Certificate (HSC). She held a master's degree in public administration and Bachelor of Business Administration marketing from Central State University, Wilberforce, Ohio, United States, in 1981 and 1983 respect. Olayinka, a marketing analyst and strategist, started her career in banking with First Bank of Nigeria Plc in 1986. She later worked as relationship manager for corporate accounts in Access Bank, the now defunct Merchant Banking Corporation [MBC] and United Bank for Africa Plc. In August 2002, she started working in corporate communications and proceeded to head the Corporate Affairs Division, United Bank for Africa. She later became head of brand management and corporate affairs, thereby leading the team responsible for delivering a compelling brand proposition and re-branding of the United Bank for Africa which helped to drive the bank's business strategy and added value to the total image of the brand. Olayinka was also the second vice president of the Association of Corporate Managers of Banks between 2002 and 2004. Olayinka played a strategic role during the merger process of the erstwhile United Bank for Africa & Standard Trust Bank, where she co-chaired the Branding Sub-Committee. She also served as a key member of the Media Relations Sub-Committee.

Until her election as the deputy governor of Ekiti State, she was head of corporate services, Ecobank Transatlantic Inc., where she was responsible for communicating the bank's activities to the public, relationship management with the public and providing feedback to management as it relates to the total image of the bank. In addition, she also oversaw the General Internal Services Unit with responsibility for overall co-ordination of administrative services for the entire bank. She was three times winner of the Dean's Honor roll. Following a disputed election process during the 2007 Gubernatorial elections, the candidate of Nigeria's ruling People's Democratic Party, Segun Oni was declared winner of that election. Olayinka in conjunction with Kayode Fayemi headed to court to contest the veracity of the results. On 14 October 2010, after a 3+1/2-year prolonged re-election process and court battle, an Elections Appeal Tribunal sitting in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria sacked former governor Segun Oni of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and declared Dr Kayode Fayemi of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) as the new governor of Ekiti State. Mrs Olufunmilayo Olayinka was subsequently sworn in as the substantive deputy governor of Ekiti State by virtue of her existing role as the running mate of Dr Kayode Fayemi during the 2007 governorship elections. She is only the second woman in the history of Ekiti State to occupy the position of deputy governor of the state. She was a member of the Action Congress of Nigeria. Olayinka died in the evening of 6 April 2013 after a long battle with cancer and she was laid to rest in Ado-Ekiti. Olayinka was a devout Christian; she was survived by her aged mother, husband and their three children.

In the same vein, Erelu Bisi Fayemi, the immediate past First Lady of Ekiti State, can be seen as a pioneering force in advancing women's political emancipation. She was known for her unwavering dedication to dismantling patriarchy and promoting gender equality, Mrs. Fayemi's legacy lies in laying a strong foundation to combat inequality in the state. Her efforts have led to equal opportunities for women in jobs, inheritance, and other benefits, creating a level playing field for all genders. Mrs. Fayemi's initiatives, particularly the Gender

Based Violence Prohibition Law of 2012, have been instrumental in breaking the chains of gender subjugation, empowering women to thrive in various spheres. The adoption of the 35 per cent affirmative action for women in politics and governance by the state government has elevated women's fortunes, making them influential players in Ekiti's political landscape.

Before her foray into politics, Erelu Bisi Fayemi had already established herself as a distinguished gender advocate. Her involvement in the formation of the African Women Development Fund (AWDF) in London showcased her commitment to empowering women across 42 African countries, lifting them from the shackles of poverty. Mrs. Fayemi's arrival as First Lady brought immense blessings to the people of Ekiti, particularly in the elevation of women in political and leadership positions. Through her influence and dedication to feminism, women gained representation in the House of Assembly and the National Assembly (Okafor, 2018). The recent inauguration of the Ekiti State House of Assembly boasts six women representatives, a testament to Erelu Bisi Fayemi's instrumental role in achieving this milestone (Okafor, 2018).

During her tenure as First Lady, Erelu initiated numerous programs aimed at safeguarding the rights of the vulnerable and less privileged. The Child's Rights Law of 2010, Gender Based Violence Prohibition Law of 2012, and Equal Opportunities Law of 2012 were among her impactful initiatives, addressing issues of sexual molestation, social oppression, neglect, and suffering among genders in the state. Erelu Bisi Fayemi's legacy is etched in the hearts of the people of Ekiti, as she indelibly engraved her name through her tireless efforts and transformative initiatives (Yusuf, 2015). Her trailblazing journey in advocating for women's rights and gender equality has made a lasting impact, setting an exemplary standard for women's political participation and empowerment in the state and beyond.

However, just recently Ms. Oluwatumininu Adedeji, the Executive Director of Balm in Gilead Foundation for Sustainable Development, has called on Ekiti State Governor, Biodun Oyebanji, to adhere to the 35 per cent affirmative action in appointing women into political offices. Adedeji praised the formation of a committee on political appointments by the governor, considering it a significant opportunity to achieve the minimum representation of 35 percent for women in political appointments in Ekiti State (Toyin, 2004). She commended the governor for fulfilling his promises by appointing qualified women to serve in the state. The foundation advocates for women's rights and urges the committee to prioritize and facilitate the reservation of at least 35 per cent of political appointments for women, as per the governor's directive during the committee's inaugural meeting (Lawal, 2009).

By achieving another unprecedented feat in women's political representation at the House of Assembly election on March 18, 2023, Ekiti State has surpassed all other sub-national governments. Ekiti now boasts the highest number of female elected lawmakers in Nigeria. In the pursuit of the 35 per cent affirmative action for women's appointment, BIGIF conducted the 'Stop Violence against Women in Politics' Campaign (Toyin, 2004). Through this campaign, all candidates for the 2022 Ekiti governorship election committed to implementing the Ekiti Women Agenda upon their election. The then-candidate and now Governor pledged to uphold the Agenda's principles, which include women's empowerment, gender equality, and inclusive governance. In August 2022, BIGIF presented the Agenda to the transition committee, and the Governor reiterated his commitment to its implementation in his inaugural speech (Olatunji, 2014). The Ekiti Women Agenda (EWA) prioritizes issues concerning Ekiti women, including the implementation of the 35 per cent Affirmative Action. This campaign received support from USAID and the Foreign Commonwealth Development Office through the National Democratic Institute (Oladeji, 2011). It aimed to address the issue of violence against women in politics, as it hinders women's full and active participation, especially during elections.

Another notable achievement was in the just concluded election. At the end of the March 18 House of Assembly elections in Ekiti, women clinched six of the 26 seats (Lawal, 2009). The governor urged continued support for the administration to increase women's participation in governance. Ekiti will be seen as a trailblazer and role model with the highest number of women in the House of Assembly (Okonkwo, 2017). The Speaker expressed joy about the increasing number of women legislators. She believes that having more women in the Assembly will lead to a more effective and orderly 7th Assembly. The six elected female members of the Assembly are from APC - Efon, APC - Ilejemeje, and APC - Emure.

The political-economic impact of women in Ekiti politics has been a crucial aspect of the state's development and governance. Over the years, women's participation in politics has not only led to positive changes in the political landscape but has also significantly influenced the state's economic growth and social progress (Adeleke, 2007). In recent times, more women have been actively involved in politics, both as voters and political leaders. Their participation has diversified the political discourse and brought new perspectives to

governance. Women's inclusion in decision-making processes has resulted in policies that address a wider range of issues, including those affecting women, children, and vulnerable groups. One notable example of women's impact in Ekiti politics is the rise of Abiodun Christine Olujimi. As a senator representing the Ekiti South constituency and the minority leader of the Nigerian Senate, she has played a vital role in advocating for policies that promote gender equality and women's empowerment (Okonkwo, 2017). Her advocacy efforts have contributed to the passing of laws that protect women's rights, such as the Gender Based Violence Prohibition Law of 2012.

Furthermore, Prof. Adelabu's contributions as the Deputy Governor of Ekiti State have been significant in shaping the state's economic policies. Her expertise in education and governance has helped in formulating policies to improve the education sector, leading to a more skilled and empowered workforce (Toyin, 2004). This, in turn, has a positive impact on the state's economy by attracting investments and promoting economic growth. Women's involvement in politics has also led to a greater focus on social welfare and development. The initiatives launched by Erelu Bisi Fayemi during her tenure as the First Lady, such as the Gender Based Violence Prohibition Law and the Equal Opportunities Law, have addressed critical social issues, including sexual molestation, social oppression, and neglect (Lawal, 2009). These efforts have improved the well-being of Ekiti's citizens and fostered an environment conducive to economic growth.

In addition to policy-making, women's participation in politics has increased the representation of women in government institutions. For instance, the Ekiti State House of Assembly now boasts six women representatives, reflecting the impact of women's political engagement. Increased representation has meant that women's voices and concerns are more effectively addressed in decision-making processes, leading to policies that promote social and economic inclusivity (Olatunji, 2014). Women's involvement in politics has also had positive economic implications at the grassroots level. Women's empowerment initiatives, such as microcredit schemes and vocational training programs, have helped women establish and grow small businesses, thereby contributing to local economic development and poverty reduction.

2. CONCLUSION

The impact of women in Èkìtì politics has been significant, influencing various aspects of society and contributing to positive changes in social dynamics. One crucial area where women have made an impact is in promoting gender equality and women's rights. Women in Èkìtì politics have been at the forefront of advocating for policies and laws that protect women's rights, address gender-based violence, and promote gender equality (Okafor, 2018). Their efforts have helped raise awareness about issues such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, and discrimination, leading to greater social consciousness and support for women's rights. The increased participation of women in politics has also served as a source of inspiration and empowerment for women in the state. When women see other women holding political offices and taking leadership roles, it encourages them to believe in their abilities and pursue their aspirations in various fields. Women's involvement in politics has shattered traditional gender norms and stereotypes, challenging the notion that politics is solely a man's domain (Okonkwo, 2017).

Moreover, women in Èkìtì politics have actively engaged in community development and social welfare initiatives. They have been instrumental in launching programs that benefit vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as women, children, and the elderly. These initiatives focus on areas like healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation, improving the overall well-being of the community (Okafor, 2018). One notable example of the social impact of women in Èkìtì politics is Erelu Bisi Fayemi's efforts during her tenure as the First Lady. Her initiatives, including the Child's Rights Law of 2010 and the Gender Based Violence Prohibition Law of 2012, have helped protect the rights of women and children, creating a safer and more supportive environment for them (Lawal, 2009).

Women's involvement in politics has also led to increased representation and inclusion in decision-making processes. The presence of women in government institutions and policymaking bodies ensures that women's concerns and perspectives are taken into account when formulating policies and programs. This has resulted in more inclusive and responsive governance, addressing the needs of various segments of the population (Yusuf, 2015). Women's political involvement has helped challenged and dismantled old traditional and religious patriarchal structures. Their active participation has challenged the notion of male dominance in politics and paved the way for greater gender inclusivity. As a result, women in Èkìtì are increasingly seen as important stakeholders in the political landscape, leading to more equitable social relations. The political, economic, and social impact of women in Ekiti politics has been profound and transformative. Women's increasing participation in politics has led to the formulation of policies that promote gender equality, women's rights, and social welfare. Notable figures like Abiodun Christine Olujimi, Prof. Adelabu, Erelu Bisi Fayemi, and many

others have played vital roles in advocating for women's empowerment and bringing about positive changes in the state. In politics, women have risen to key positions, influencing decision-making processes and contributing to more inclusive governance. Their representation in the Ekiti State House of Assembly and the National Assembly showcases the progress made towards achieving gender balance in political leadership.

Economically, women's involvement in politics has led to policies and initiatives that address economic disparities and promote entrepreneurship and skills development among women. These efforts have contributed to economic growth, poverty reduction, and enhanced livelihoods for women and their communities. On the social front, women's empowerment in Ekiti politics has challenged traditional gender norms, raised awareness about women's rights, and fostered a more inclusive and equitable society. Initiatives like the Gender Based Violence Prohibition Law and other social welfare programs have improved the well-being of vulnerable groups and protected their rights (Adebayo, 2008).

Over time we have had some prominent female politicians in Ekiti politics and democratic processes. These women have served as a face in politics in Ekiti state, with dire zeal, passion, and willingness to be heard this women have played major role in politics within this state and also gaining recognition even beyond the state (Yusuf, 2015). The study conducted on women's political participation in Ekiti State revealed important insights into the factors influencing women's involvement in politics in Ekiti. Socio-economic development plays a significant role in shaping women's political participation. Due to the high cost of elections in Nigeria, many women in Ekiti lack the financial resources to compete against male candidates. As a result, they often choose to invest their money in other economic activities rather than engaging in political pursuits. Additionally, the likelihood of receiving support from political parties and winning elections is perceived to be low, further discouraging women from actively participating in the political process.

Moreover, the cultural and historical legacies in Nigeria also contribute to the low political participation of women in Ekiti. The patriarchal system and male domination within the society relegate women to secondary roles, leading to the perception that politics is primarily a man's domain. This cultural belief discourages women from seeking political positions as they may encounter resistance and gender-based stereotypes, making it challenging for them to succeed in political endeavors. Consequently, the impact of these factors on women in Ekiti politics is evident. Women experience limited representation in political offices and face challenges in gaining significant political roles. The lack of financial strength acts as a major obstacle, making it difficult for women to compete effectively in elections. Additionally, the historical legacy of women being excluded from active political involvement contributes to a sense of disempowerment, further reducing the number of women seeking political positions.

In Ekiti State, women's political participation faces significant challenges arising from deeply ingrained societal perceptions and historical legacies (Adeleke, 2007). The prevailing view within the society often sees women involved in politics as mere ornaments, undermining the seriousness of their political ambitions and contributions. As a result, women who choose to engage in politics are often labeled as promiscuous, leading to stigmatization and discouragement from their husbands, families, and communities. This negative perception of women in politics not only hampers their motivation but also perpetuates gender stereotypes, creating a hostile environment for women aspiring to be politically active. The fear of being judged and ostracized can deter potential women candidates from even considering running for political office. Consequently, this societal bias restricts the pool of female political aspirants, limiting the number of women actively participating in the political process.

Furthermore, Ekiti State's political landscape is marked by a culture of political violence, which adds to the challenges faced by women seeking political positions. The volatile environment characterized by intimidation and aggression is particularly detrimental to women's political involvement. The threat of violence acts as a deterrent for women, dissuading them from entering the male-dominated political arena and hindering their ability to freely express their political opinions and ideas. Religious practices also play a role in constraining women's political participation in Ekiti State. Certain interpretations of religious teachings may restrict women to traditional family responsibilities, reinforcing gender roles that discourage active engagement in politics. The perception that politics is incompatible with women's domestic duties limits their access to political opportunities and leadership positions. Additionally, historical legacies of gender exclusion further impede women's progress in Ekiti politics. The long-standing marginalization of women from colonial administration and military roles has created a legacy that continues to influence the representation and empowerment of women in political spaces. These historical imbalances have contributed to the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions and continue to shape societal attitudes towards women's political involvement.

The Nigerian political structure significantly influences women's political participation in Ekiti State. Despite Nigeria being a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and developing its gender policy in 2007, the government's commitment to promoting gender balance remains superficial (Lawal, 2009). The National Gender Policy, intended to address gender disparities, has not effectively translated into tangible outcomes. Instead, it exists largely as a document without substantial implementation in reality (Okafor, 2018). In the context of Ekiti State, this study aligns with existing literature, which highlights various factors impacting women's political participation (Oladeji, 2011). Socio-economic development, cultural values, historical legacies, and institutional structures are key elements that affect women's engagement in politics, not only in Nigeria but also worldwide. These factors collectively hinder women from transcending the traditional role of merely voting to actively participating in the political arena.

The Nigerian political structure in Ekiti State plays a crucial role in shaping women's involvement in politics. Despite the country's commitment to gender equality through international agreements like CEDAW, the implementation of these policies remains inadequate, resulting in limited progress in empowering women in politics (Adebayo, 2008). Ekiti State, like the rest of Nigeria, has a National Gender Policy aimed at addressing gender disparities. However, the policy's effectiveness falls short of expectations, as it lacks practical implementation and fails to bring about significant changes in women's political participation. Effective implementation of gender policies, empowerment programs, and awareness campaigns can create an enabling environment for women's active engagement in politics (Okafor, 2018). By breaking down barriers and challenging cultural norms, Ekiti can pave the way for more women to become key stakeholders in the political process, leading to a more inclusive and representative governance system (Aisha, 2010). To address these challenges, there is a need for comprehensive efforts to promote gender equality and empower women in Ekiti State. This includes challenging and debunking societal stereotypes about women in politics, advocating for an inclusive and safe political environment free from violence, and encouraging women's active participation in political processes (Adeleke, 2007). Public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives are vital to changing perceptions and attitudes towards women's political participation. Women's leadership and providing opportunities for political training and capacity building can empower women to confidently engage in politics and aspire to leadership positions (Akinwunmi, 2010). Moreover, engaging religious leaders in advocating for gender equality and women's political empowerment can help challenge restrictive interpretations of religious teachings. Encouraging women's involvement in decision-making bodies and government appointments can help break down historical barriers and foster a more inclusive political landscape. By addressing these challenges and implementing targeted interventions, Ekiti State can take significant strides towards achieving gender parity in politics, ensuring that women's voices are heard, and their contributions are valued in shaping the state's governance and development. Embracing diversity and inclusivity in politics can lead to better representation and more effective policies that cater to the needs of all citizens, regardless of gender (Ifeoma, 2012).

REFERENCE

1. Adebayo, F. (2008). Empowerment Through Politics: Women in Ekiti Political Landscape. *Gender Studies Review* , 12 (2), 25-40.
2. Adeleke, Y. (2007). Women leaders and Policy Advocacy in Ekit State. *African Politics Today* , 17 (2), 2007.
3. Aisha, A. (2010). Women leaders and Policy change in Ekiti. *Journal of Politics and Public Policy* , 13 (2), 137-150.
4. Akinwunmi, C. (2010). The Role of Women in Ekiti's Democratization Process. *International Journal of Politics and Governance* , 14 (3), 45-60.
5. Duyile, W. A., & Ojo, O. O. (2020). The First Republic and Democratic Governance: Intra-Ethnic Politics Prior to the Nigerian Civil War. *Icheke: A Multi- Disciplinary Journal of the Faculty of Humanities; Ignatius Ajuru University of Education* , 18 (1), 111.
6. Duyile, W. A., & Olabimpe, O. O. (2019). A Historical Contextualization of Botswana- Nigerian Political and Economic Relations, 1971-2012. *International Journal of History and Cultural Studies* , 5 (2), 43.
7. Duyile, W. A., Adu, M. F., Jegede, G. G., & Oluwafemi, B. L. (2020). A Historical Study of Boko Haram Activities in Nigeria, 2009-2015. *European Journal of Social Sciences* , 59 (2), 239.
8. Duyile, W. A., Nwachukwu, J. U., Ediagbonya, M., & Olofinbaika, P. P. (2020). The Gender Question and the Nigerian Fourth Republic, 1999-2015. *The International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies* , 8 (3), 366.
9. Ifeoma, J. (2012). Breaking the Barrier Woman Political Aspiration in Ekiti State. *Political Science Quarterly* , 45 (3), pp60-85.
10. Lawal, N. (2009). The Impact of Women in Ekiti Legislative Assembly. *Journal of African Governance* , 18 (2), 75-90.

11. Okafor, N. O. (2018). Women in Ekiti Politics: A Comparative Analysis. *African Journal of Politics and Governance* , 29 (4), 55-70.
12. Okonkwo, O. (2017). The Role of Woman in Ekiti State Assembly. *Journal of Gender Studies* , 32 (2), 80-95.
13. Oladeji, B. (2011). Women Representation in Ekiti Politics. *Political Studies Review* , 22 (3), 40-55.
14. Olatunji, T. (2014). Breaking Stereotype Women in Ekiti Politics . *Gender and Society* , 28 (4), 5.
15. Toyin, A. (2004). Women Activism and Grassroots Politics in Ekiti. *Journal of Women Empowerment* , pp 30-45.
16. Yusuf, H. (2015). Promoting Woman's Political Engagement: A case of Ekiti. *Gender and Development Journal* , 25 (3), 120-130.