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Women's Political Participation and its Predictors in Northern and Southern Nigeria

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Summary

The United Nations Development Programme states that women's political participation is a necessary ingredient for a peaceful and resilient society, yet large gender gaps obstinately persist in many countries around the globe. With a focus on Nigeria and using an analysis of data from Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 General Elections and Afrobarometer's 2018 Nigeria Round 7 survey, this paper explores variations of women's political participation across Southern and Northern Nigeria. In recent times, Northern Nigeria has experienced extensive conflict, and Southern Nigeria outperforms the north in terms of women's education, participation in paid employment and control of earnings. Given these factors, conventional wisdom among policy actors and researchers would predict that women in Southern Nigeria should have considerably higher rates of political participation than those in Northern Nigeria. However, digging deeper into the available data on political participation, the paper suggests that factors such as education and employment do not predict the dimensions of women's political participation or can predict the unexpected. The paper concludes that policymakers may need to look beyond these conventional factors when supporting programmes on women's political participation in Nigeria. More research is needed into contextual factors to better understand what lies behind the varying levels of women's political participation in Northern and Southern Nigeria.

Authors

Oyewole A. Oladapo (PhD) is a Lecturer in the Department of Communication and Language Arts, University of Ibadan. His research focuses on multidisciplinary approach to understanding political discourse and citizen action. He has published in peer-reviewed journals on themes such as gender, social media activism, and politics.

Martin Atela (PhD) is a Research Scientist with interests in accountability and governance, health systems strengthening, community engagement and mixed methods approaches to complex research. Martin leads the Research and Policy Unit at the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR – Kenya) and provides graduate supervision and mentorship at the College of Health Sciences, University of Nairobi and Implementation Sciences, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. He earned his PhD from the University of Cambridge, UK and is a Gates Cambridge Alumnus.

Damilola T. Agbalajobi (PhD) is a Lecturer in the Department of Political Science, Obafemi Awolowo University. Damilola has written a couple of articles that have appeared in peer review journals and books on her areas of research interest which are: women in politics; women and peace building; gender and power; gender and corruption; gender and governance in Africa; gender and climate change; gender-based violence; and sustainable development.

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Acknowledgements

Acronyms

BBOG	Bring Back Our Girls
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
GDP	gross domestic product
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
MP	Member of Parliament
NBC	National Bureau of Statistics
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States

1. Introduction

Gender inclusion is an important element of any country's social, economic, and political development. Gender exclusion and other institutionalised inequities and an inequality in politics can lead to serious socioeconomic and political difficulties especially for plural states like Nigeria (the focus of this Working Paper), with deep social cleavages that make them prone to conflict and violence. Gender relations characterised by gender exclusion thus become more than mere analytical categories; they can be real sources of conflict, instability and discontent. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2021) puts the implications of gender exclusion more pointedly: '[s]ocieties whose political institutions are more inclusive and participatory, tend to be more peaceful and resilient, just as societies practicing exclusion tend to be more vulnerable to fragility and conflict'.

Gender inclusion has been highlighted as being central to a country's pursuit of peace. In explaining why this is so, Baranyi and Powell (2005) note that opportunities and threats to state building cannot be understood without first understanding gender roles and relations. This assertion further reiterates the argument that the search for national development in most states, especially those in Africa, is founded on a template that fails to reckon with women and their skill sets and competences (Bullough *et al.*). In Nigeria, within the crisis generated by religious fundamentalism and ethnic chauvinism, gender inequity and inequality constitute a unique dimension that complicates, and is complicated by, Nigeria's governance predicament.

The literature on gender and development in Nigeria, and especially on the complex relationship between women's participation and Nigeria's democratic governance, is vast. Nigeria's postcolonial governance structure has often been interrogated in terms of the north–south divide. While this framework has its own analytical limitations, it yields critical insights for understanding the geopolitical dynamics of gender roles, relations and inequality across Nigeria. Current literature has mapped these geopolitical dynamics of women's participation in Nigeria's democratic experiment. The literature demonstrates a trajectory that shows Southern Nigeria, with fewer incidents of violent conflict, as more favourable to women's political participation than Northern Nigeria. Besides experiencing fewer violent conflicts, Southern Nigeria is also noted to perform better than Northern Nigeria on more conventional predictors of women's political participation such as higher levels of women's educational attainment and increased participation in paid employment. The literature also highlights a relationship between religious affiliation and its influence on political participation. Social scientists argue that the Christian south facilitates women's political participation more than the Muslim north (Dim and Asomah 2019).

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Our study, while noting some of the gaps in the existing literature, complements what has previously been done by adding further to the understanding of the explanatory variations between the north and the south in terms of women's participation in the democratic dynamics of Nigeria. In particular, we seek to contribute the use of generalisable methods to explain the predictors of women's political participation in Northern and Southern Nigeria, while drawing on a set of nationally representative data of Nigerian women that explain their political participation and representation. Although Dim and Asomah (2019) carried out a factor analysis of predictors of Nigerian women's political participation, their conceptualisation of political participation, for instance, is limited to claim-making on government. They excluded other important dimensions of the notion such as voting in elections, working for a candidate or party, and attending political campaign rallies.

Our study involves the testing of the statistical significance of some of the factors that have been used in the literature for predicting forms of women's political participation. These factors are: representation in political institutions, participation in the electoral process, and specific forms of civic action. Representation in political institutions is measured by interrogating the number of women who run for or hold elective office; electoral participation is demonstrated by the number of women who vote, work for a candidate, or attend campaign events; while forms of civic action are shown by looking at women making claims on government. We first examined the levels of women's representation in political institutions in Northern and Southern Nigeria through the analysis of explanatory variables such as women's educational attainment, participation in formal employment, control over earnings, dynamics of gender equality in leadership, and prevalence of neighbourhood violence. We then examined which of these explanatory variables predict Nigerian women's voting, attending campaign events, working for candidates, and making claims on government.

2. Understanding women's political participation

In this paper, we explore three aspects of women's political participation in Nigeria: (1) women's representation in political institutions, (2) women's participation in the electoral process, and (3) women's civic participation. In this section, we use these three indices to outline the Nigerian context in comparison to global and or regional trends.

2.1 Women's representation in political institutions

Women's representation in elective office varies from country to country and is modulated by the nature of the state and the dynamics of the state's governance and political structures. In most countries, women are more represented in the legislative arm of government than in the executive arm (Goetz 2003). Established liberal democracies such as the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK) and Canada have recorded a general increase in women's political representation in recent years (Wineinger and Nugent 2020). For instance, in 2014, an increase in the number of women in the US's congress and state legislatures saw them occupy 19 per cent and 24 per cent of the seats respectively. In Africa's budding democracies, however, where elective offices have been the preserve of men, women's political representation has remained constant albeit with some exceptions. For instance, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda, Mozambique, South Africa and Namibia have all recorded an increase in the number of women in their parliaments in recent years (Townley 2019). Based on data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union current figures for women's representation in these countries as of 2020 are: Rwanda (61.3 per cent lower house, 38.46 per cent upper house), South Africa (46.58 per cent upper house, 37.74 per cent lower house), Namibia (43.27 per cent lower house, 19.05 per cent upper house), Mozambique (41.2 per cent), Ethiopia (38.8 per cent lower house, 32 per cent upper house), and Uganda (34.9 per cent).

However, Nigeria's case is the reverse of the regional trend in women's participation in political leadership. In fact, women are hardly visible in the country's political narrative (Awofeso and Odeyemi 2014). A woman has never been elected president, vice president nor governor since Nigeria's independence. The highest number of female deputy governors ever attained was six out of the possible 36 elected in 2007. Since then, the number has consistently decreased. Eight women were elected senators in 2007; the number dropped to seven in 2011, and rose back to eight in 2015, with eight being the

highest number of female senators ever recorded in the country since 1999. The situation is not any different in the 360-member Federal House of Representatives which recorded its highest female representation in 2011 with a total of 26 women elected (7.2 per cent).

2.2 Women's participation in the electoral process

Another aspect of women's political participation is participation in the electoral process. Unlike representation in elective political office, which is globally dominated by men, women's participation in the electoral process as voters has been on the rise, especially in the democracies of Europe and America (Kostelka, Blais, and Gidengil 2019). Since women are not a monolithic group, their voting turnout varies along distinguishing lines such as race or ethnicity, religion or social class. In the US, for example, black women posted the highest turnout (66 per cent) compared to any other women in the 2012 election (Farris and Holman 2014).

A second important point to consider in understanding women's participation in electoral processes is the voting process itself. A narrow conceptualisation of voting in the scholarly literature fails to account for the practical complexity of what it represents. Voting is normally seen as a dichotomous variable with an 'either/or' possibility. It is either one voted or one did not vote, leading some scholars (Mangi, Shah and Ali Soomro 2019) to describe voting as one of the easiest among the varied forms of political participation. In reality, however, voting as a measure of political participation is not as unproblematic as some scholars suggest, especially in the Nigerian context. In fact, the physical act of voting is the last in a process of actions that constitute voting. The process starts long before the elections, with the voter registration exercise without which participation in voting is impossible. In Nigeria, voter registration involves the biometric capturing of voter's information. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) uses the information captured to produce the voter's card which allows a voter to vote on election day.

However, possession of a voter's card does not automatically qualify a voter to vote. Each voter is expected to participate in voter accreditation on election day. Voter accreditation is part of an election day process in which a voter's biometrics are verified against those recorded in INEC's database at the time of voter registration. Only the voters who get accredited are allowed to vote. There have been cases of people whose names are missing in the final voter register, even though they possess a valid voter's card issued at the point of registration. Such voters are not accredited and thus excluded from voting. In 2015, 18 per cent of registered voters failed the accreditation process, did not receive their Permanent Voter's Card, and were automatically excluded from voting in the General Elections (Situation Room 2015). In the same 2015 General Elections,

about 2.3 million registrants were accredited but did not vote due to one form of disruption or another (European Union 2019).

Such occurrences show that basing political participation on valid votes cast in an election underestimates actual electoral participation in Nigeria. A voter has to scale a number of hurdles in order to cast his or her vote. Lumping someone who did not register to vote and someone who was prevented from voting by neighbourhood violence or other factors into the same category of 'voter apathy' is conceptually problematic. Reconceptualising voting as a process consisting of a number of acts, instead of treating it as a single monolithic act, is important for measuring women's political participation.

In addition to voting, two other forms of female participation in the electoral process are of specific interest to this research: working for a political candidate and attendance at political campaign rallies. Pyeatt and Yanus (2017) observe that, generally around the world, women trail men in these forms of political participation. Spence and McClerking (2010) also note that among African Americans in the US, these two forms of political participation are more common among men than they are among women. While many factors may explain a lower level of female involvement in working for political candidates and attending political campaign rallies, it is important to note that both activities take women out of the safety of their homes or environments. These two issues are of interest to this study because of how they are linked with the context of violence, and where cultural norms place some limitations on women's freedom and public agency.

2.3 Women's civic participation

The conception of political participation has come to include some actions previously considered to be non-political (Goetz 2003). Among them are civic actions, such as making claims on the government of the day, which have an indirect route to influencing political decisions. People make claims on government or other forms of authorities in different ways. They could do this by joining a protest, boycotting service or duty, or signing a petition (Dalton 2008). Claims can also be made by contacting people in authority such as local government councillors, members of parliament, officials of government agencies, political party officials, traditional leaders, or religious leaders, and the media. People make these claims either as individuals or by joining groups that are dedicated to forms of civic action. What is common to different forms of civic action is that they are geared toward ensuring a better society (Wicks *et al.* 2013).

Some scholars have argued that civic spaces are being undermined in many countries, with dire implications for the articulation of the responses of the citizens, as well as for development (Hossain and Santos 2018). Research by

Loukakis and Portos (2019) in nine European countries, examines to what extent young people have responded to the implications of neoliberal and austerity policies through protest and non-protest claims making. In Asia, Africa and Latin America, research shows that poor and marginalised citizens tend to avoid engagement altogether when the cost of challenging power is more than they can bear (Pettit 2016). However, this does not suggest that people, especially women, have stopped making claims on government in those regions. In Latin America, although numerically women lag behind men in civic participation, when they do participate they are as involved as men (Espinal and Zhao 2015). In Mexico, female participation in demonstrations as a form of claims making is high, although only among women who are free from domestic restrictions laid down by their husbands and free from house chores (Albarracin, Munier and Bail 2017).

In Nigeria, women engage in different forms of civic action, notably the #Bring Back Our Girls (BBOG) movement which used different media and forms of civic action to demand that the government rescue over 200 schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram terrorists in 2014 (Ojebode and Oladapo 2018). The BBOG raised public consciousness and recruited members locally and internationally, using civic action such as social media activism, protests, rallies, and daily sit outs to hold the government accountable for securing the release of the abducted Chibok schoolgirls (Aina *et al.* 2019). However, Nigeria has been witnessing a shrinking of its civic space due to government intolerance of both online and offline protests and any other form of action that is intentioned to demand public accountability. While the BBOG movement also operated within a closing civic space characterised by police brutality and arrest, the closure has worsened since 2015 under the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari. Nevertheless, as the resilience of the BBOG movement shows, closure of civic space does not always foreclose women's civic action.

3. Predictors of women's political participation and the Nigerian situation: Evidence from the literature

Women tend to exhibit higher levels of political participation in established democracies in Europe and North America compared to developing democracies found in Africa (Stockemer 2014). Nevertheless, the factors that predict women's political participation vary from context to context. Townley (2019) observes that predictors of women's political participation in European, American and sub-Saharan African countries are unlikely to be the same, given the contextual variations between the regions. Yet, available literature seems to ignore this difference and continues to explain women's political participation in Africa based on conventionally defined predictors. As many countries have diverse populations, within-country variations as well should be expected in women's political participation.

What is today known as Nigeria comprised the Northern Protectorate, the Southern Protectorate, and the Crown Colony of Lagos created and independently administered by the British colonialists in 1900. In 1906, the British government merged the Southern Protectorate and the Lagos Colony under the name 'the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria and the Colony', while the Northern Protectorate remained intact. The unification agenda was finally completed on 1 January 1914, when the British, through Lord Lugard, amalgamated the two erstwhile Protectorates of north and south and the Lagos Colony under a single unit of administration.

Prior to the colonial period, the northern and southern regions had a number of cultural and religious differences. In terms of religion, Islam penetrated the north while Christianity penetrated the south. In terms of ethnicity, the Hausa and the Fulani are the major groups in the north while the south is largely occupied by the Igbo and the Yoruba. Regardless of the various interactions between the north and the south, some of their differences have remained pronounced to date. Below, we highlight some of these differences.

3.1 Education

In many contexts, globally, access to education has been shown to be an important factor for increasing women's participation in political leadership (Bullough *et al.* 2012). For instance, in Sweden, increased access to education,

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even only at lower secondary level, has been linked to an increase in the chance of women running for political office by up to 30 per cent (Lindgren, Oskarsson and Persson 2019). However, in the US, black women have shown to exhibit higher levels of political participation, especially representation in elective offices, compared to other women, despite lower levels of educational attainment (Farris and Holman 2014). Farris and Holman (2014) argue that black women make up for the gap in educational attainment through social capital measured as membership, attendance, and leadership in community groups, as well as attendance at a community event, a club meeting, or a public meeting.

This mixed relationship between levels of education and women's political participation is noted in non-Western societies as well. Isaksson, Kotsadam and Nerman (2014) found that in developing democracies, political participation is often higher among those who are disadvantaged on the grounds of education. However, Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras and Iyer (2013) report that education increased Indian women's political participation as voters and as candidates. Kinge and Adepoju's (2014) study among southwest Cameroonian women also demonstrated that women's attainment of formal education is significantly related to voting and contesting elective public office. Educational attainment/levels thus appear to have different effects on women's political participation in different countries: some countries with high education attainment levels for women have low political participation and vice versa (Goetz 2003). For example, in Mozambique, Rwanda and Uganda, women's low education attainment levels and relatively high representation in elective public offices, especially in the legislature, are reported to go together (Goetz 2003). This nexus is confirmed by Datzberger and Le Mat (2019) who report that education does not have that much of a political empowerment effect on Ugandan women, where those in regions with low access to education are more politically engaged compared to those in regions with better access to education. This could be as a result of the role played by the electoral system and the candidate recruitment process. According to Goetz (2003), the electoral system is a set of rules that determines how votes should be assigned to seats and in most cases these rules tend to favour elites and men in majority-plurality systems. In addition to this is the adoption of quotas for women. Studies show that countries with this provision like the Scandinavian countries, South Africa, Namibia, Argentina, France, and Mozambique have an average of 35 per cent women in their national assemblies.

Studies in Nigeria, however, argue that education is key to solving the problem of women's low political participation, suggesting that Nigerian women's political participation is low because their access to education is low (Dim and Asomah 2019; Odionye 2016; Oloyede 2015; Orji *et al.* 2018). These scholars believe that if access to education is improved, other factors such as prejudice and discrimination against women in politics will be addressed. This position,

however, must factor in the wide socioeconomic disparity that separates Northern from Southern Nigeria. The most recent demographic and health survey show that there is a wide gap between the number of women with secondary education and above in Northern Nigeria (13.7 per cent) and Southern Nigeria (37.4 per cent) (National Population Commission and ICF 2019), an indication that the south has an educational advantage over the north and thus would seem to provide a better opportunity for women's political participation.

3.2 Economic viability

The level of economic development of a country has an influence on women's ability to participate in politics (Zani and Barrett 2012). In other words, as a country's economy expands, the increased level of wellbeing positively influences women's political participation. Bullough *et al.* (2012) further relate it directly to leadership, stating that the economic viability of a country is critical to enabling more women to take political leadership positions. It is noteworthy that economic development in Nigeria is uneven. This is evident in the economic viability index of the states.[1] The reason is that state revenue in Nigeria comprises mainly internally generated revenue and federal allocation. Some states with low gross domestic product (GDP) receive high federal allocation, making their total revenue higher than those with high GDP but low federal allocation. The economic viability index for each state and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) was computed from data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBC), using state-generated income as a percentage of federal allocation for 2018. The data is summarised in Figures 3.1a and 3.1b.

Among northern states presented in Figure 3.1a, only the FCT demonstrates a degree of economic viability according to these measures. With the FCT being the federal capital and hence the seat of federal government, it should be taken as an outlier which is not representative of other states in the region. Similarly, among southern states (Figure 3.1b), only Lagos and Ogun are economically viable, having internally generated about 146.61 per cent and 90.65 per cent of their federal revenue allocations respectively in 2018. The mean economic viability score for northern states is 21.9; and if the FCT is removed, it drops to 10.7. The southern states' mean economic viability score is 29.7, but if Lagos and Ogun are removed, it drops to 16.8. The economic viability gap between south and north is thus 6.1. This economic disparity is evident as well in the distribution of poverty in Nigeria. Herbert and Husaini (2018) put the poverty rate in the north at 72 per cent and in the south at 27 per cent.

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[1]   Economic viability measures the extent to which states have access to resources to meet their needs. The economic viability index reveals the economic situation of each constituent unit better than GDP.

Figure 3.1a Economic viability index for Northern Nigeria
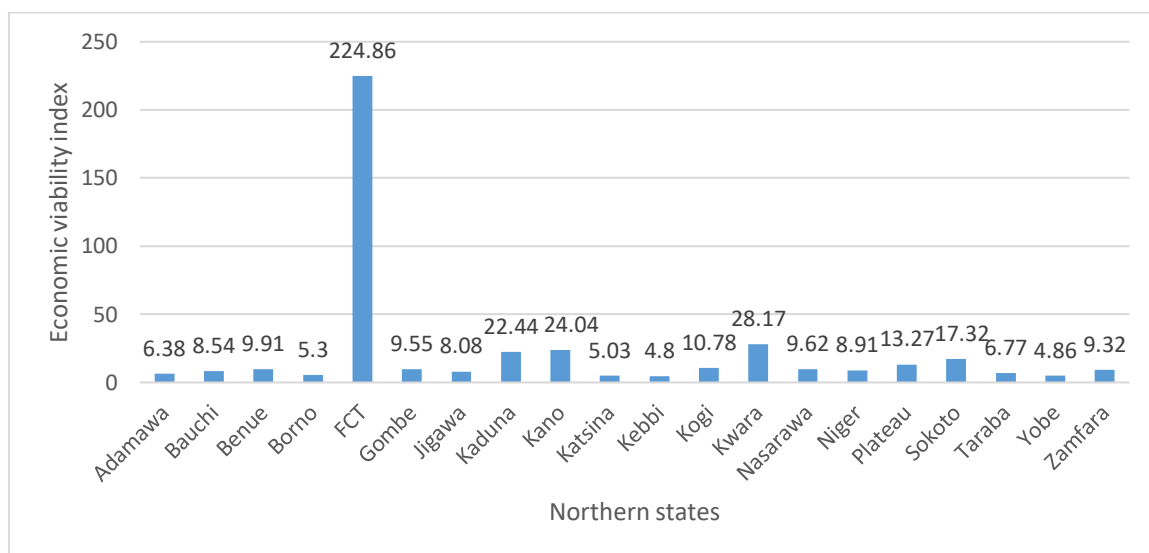
Source: Authors' own, based on National Bureau of Statistics (2019)

Figure 3.1b Economic viability index for Southern Nigeria
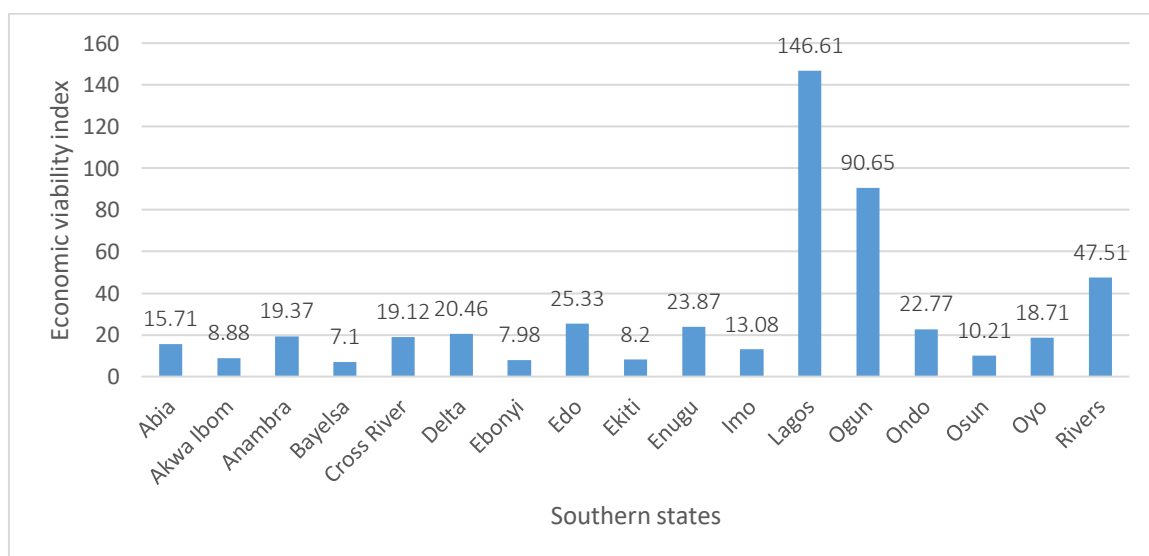
Source: Authors' own, based on National Bureau of Statistics (2019)

The south has oil deposits as an economic advantage over the north. The country's fiscal policy gives special preference to the oil producing states in sharing oil proceeds among the federating units (British Council Nigeria 2012). For instance, the fiscal principle of derivation allocates a certain percentage of the oil earnings to the oil producing states before the remainder is then shared

among all the federating units. The regional disparity is equally apparent in state budgets. In 2018, the north projected an average spend of $78.10 per citizen while the south projected more than double that ($181.99 per citizen). The critical point to make, however, is that the economic prosperity of a country does not always translate automatically into empowerment for women. A good example in this case is Saudi Arabia. Despite its level of economic wealth, Saudi Arabia is only recently loosening its tight grip on the restriction of women in the social and political dynamics of the country.

3.3 Employment and income

Participation in paid employment and access to income are considered important factors which instigate women's active participation in politics. Hern (2018) notes that African women who are engaged in formal employment tend to develop skills that aid political participation. In Tunisia, for instance, Abdo-Katsipis (2017) found that employment with complementary high levels of income increases women's political participation. Mlambo, Kapingura, and Meissner's (2019) study of the South African Development Commission region also demonstrated the connection between women's political participation and their involvement in the labour force. In Latin America as well, participation in paid employment and control over one's income were found to have some degree of influence on Mexican women's political participation (Albarracin *et al.* 2017).

The US is an exception to these studies, where political participation is higher among black women with lower incomes compared to other women (Farris and Holman 2014). This US example resonates with findings from a study on 20 developing democracies in Africa which found that political participation is often higher among those who are disadvantaged on the grounds of income (Isaksson *et al.* 2014). The crucial point to make should then be that as with education, the relationship of employment and income to women's political participation is not simple and linear. In some contexts, while employment and income are significant variables, they cannot on their own improve women's political participation. This is consistent with the observation that religious and cultural norms also exert influence on women's employment and moderate women's political participation (Isaksson *et al.* 2014). Control over one's income may be as important to women's political participation as access to employment and income. To understand the situation for Nigerian women, we examine women's access to employment and control over earnings in Northern and Southern Nigeria.

Figure 3.2a Women's employment in Northern Nigeria
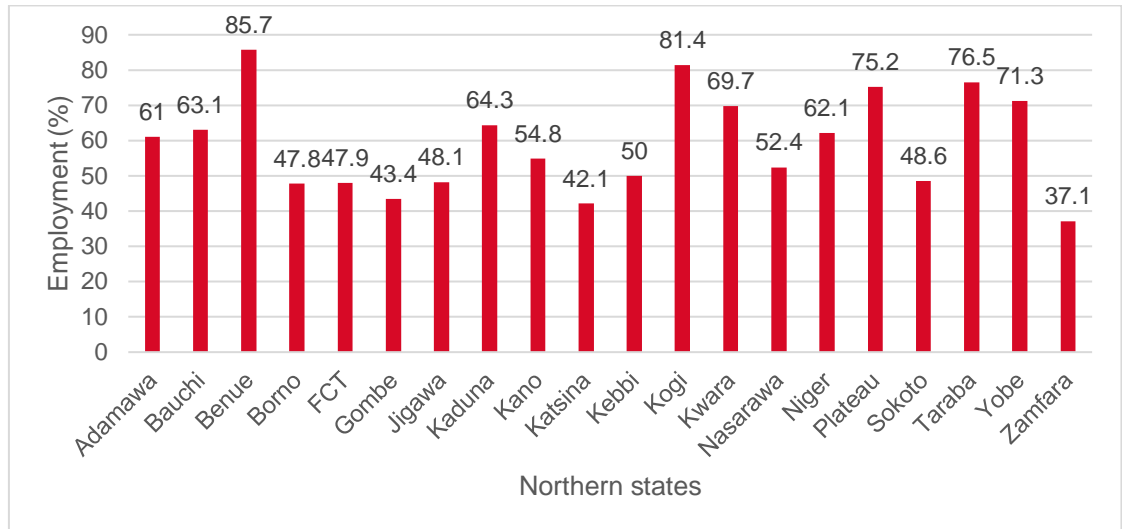
Source: Authors' own, based on National Population Commission and ICF (2019)

As shown in Figures 3.2a and 3.2b, employment rates are 15.1 per cent higher among women in Southern Nigeria (74.2 per cent) compared to Northern Nigeria (59.1 per cent). However, as noted above, while participation in paid employment provides women with access to economic resources and skills that are useful for political participation, the control that women have over their employment income is equally important.

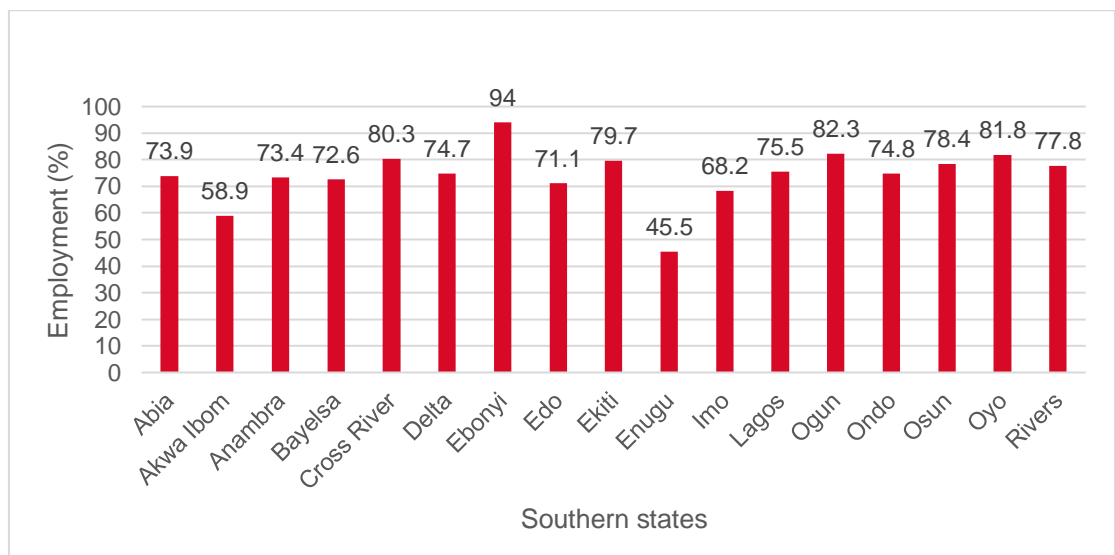# Figure 3.2b Women's employment in Southern Nigeria

Source: Authors' own, based on National Population Commission and ICF (2019)
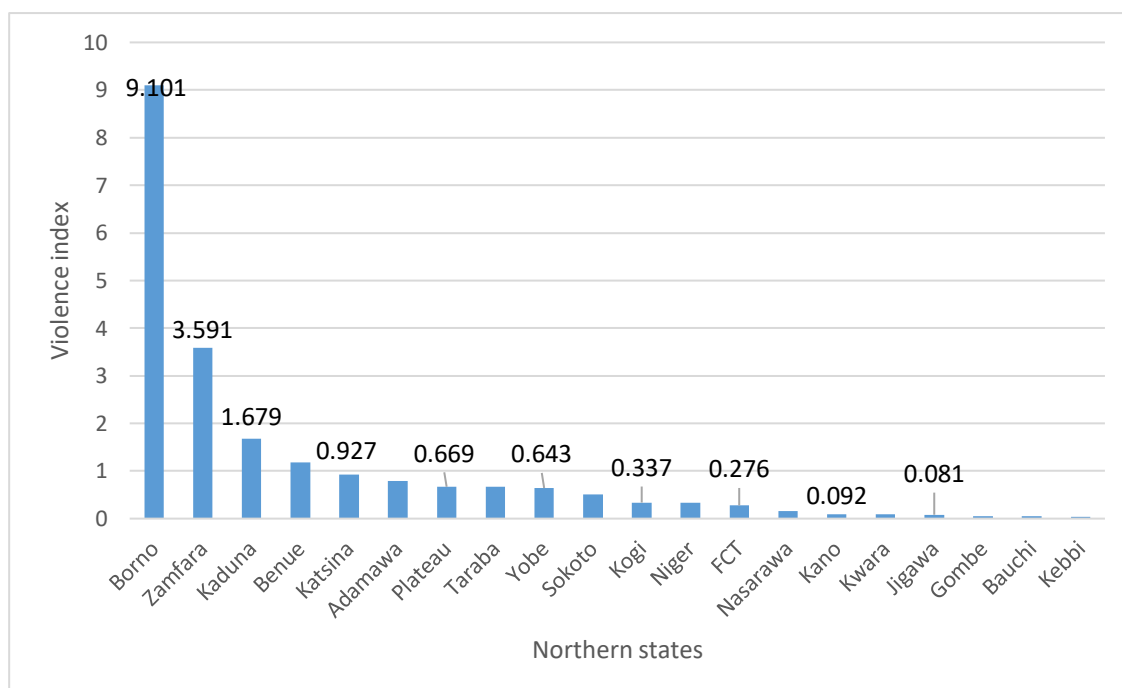
3.4 Violence

There are many studies which examine the particular challenge that women politicians face in respect of violence (see for example A4EA study from Pakistan: Khan, Yousuf and Naqvi 2020). Crook and Sanín categorise this violence as physical, involving bodily harm; psychological, for instance giving direct verbal or written threats; sexual, e.g. sexual assault; economic, for instance withholding funding; and semiotic, for example using sexist language (Crook and Sanín 2020: 743–45). They note this violence is prevalent and that 'globally, nearly all female MPs have experienced psychological violence in the course of their parliamentary work' (*ibid.*: 741). However, Piscopo (2016) notes that a narrow focus on violence against women politicians risks overlooking the deep seated structure of violence in which it is situated and from which it stems. She notes that 'generalised insecurity can immobilise the [electoral] process' (2016: 441), for example, high rates of different forms of violence in Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa, compared to other parts of the world, constitute a disincentive to participation in politics, particularly for women. In Mexico, an increase in the intensity of criminal violence has been associated with low voter turnout (Trelles and Carreras 2012). Similar experiences have been reported in Bangladesh (Ley 2017; Paasilinna, Palmer-Wetherald and Ritchie 2017), and in Nigeria (Arowolo and Aluko 2010; Kelly 2019).

Although Nigeria has witnessed a spate of violent crises for over a decade, the violence is not evenly distributed across the country. The northern part of the country is more affected. Such violent crises have been found to undermine women's political participation (Kelly 2019; Orji, Orji and Agbanyim 2018). Conflict and violence in Nigeria take many forms and are often pervasive. While some of the conflicts are regional, others are experienced countrywide. Violence experienced countrywide includes police brutality, inter-community clashes, herder-farmer clashes, and kidnapping and abduction for ritual purposes and for ransom. Those that are regional include the Boko Haram insurgency and banditry in the north, and militancy and secessionist agitations in the south (Azad, Crawford and Kaila 2018). Christianity and Islam are the two main religions in Nigeria, with Muslims estimated to comprise 53.5 per cent of the population, Roman Catholics 10.6 per cent, other Christians 35.3 per cent, and other minority faiths 0.6 per cent (Central Intelligence Agency 2018). The Muslim population is concentrated in the north while the Christian population is predominant in the south. Religionised politics and politicised religion therefore provide the context for a conflictual relationship in Nigeria. Suspicions and allegations of attempts to Islamise Nigeria climaxed in the emergence of the Boko Haram extremist militant group in 2002 (Aghedo and Surulola 2013; Bamidele 2018). How the tensions between Christians and Muslims on political issues affects women's political participation remains largely unexplored.

Nigeria has a long history of gender-based violence taking place before, during and after elections, and there are a number of studies that identify the nexus between electoral violence and women's participation in these processes (Agbalajobi and Agunbiade 2016; Luka 2011; Orji and Uzodi 2012). In 2011, Nigeria experienced pre-election and post-election violence that resulted in the deaths of female supporters and other citizens. Figures 3.3a and 3.3b show the violence index per state in Northern and Southern Nigeria in the year leading up to Nigeria's 2019 General Elections. The figures show that the rate of violence in the northern region of Nigeria was far higher than it was in the southern region. The violence rate in the northern region is plotted against an aggregate of ten, but the violence rate in the south is plotted against an aggregate of one, because all southern states recorded violence scores below one.

Figure 3.3a Violence index per state in Northern Nigeria

Source: Authors' own, based on Council on Foreign Relations (2020)

Figure 3.3b Violence index per state in Southern Nigeria
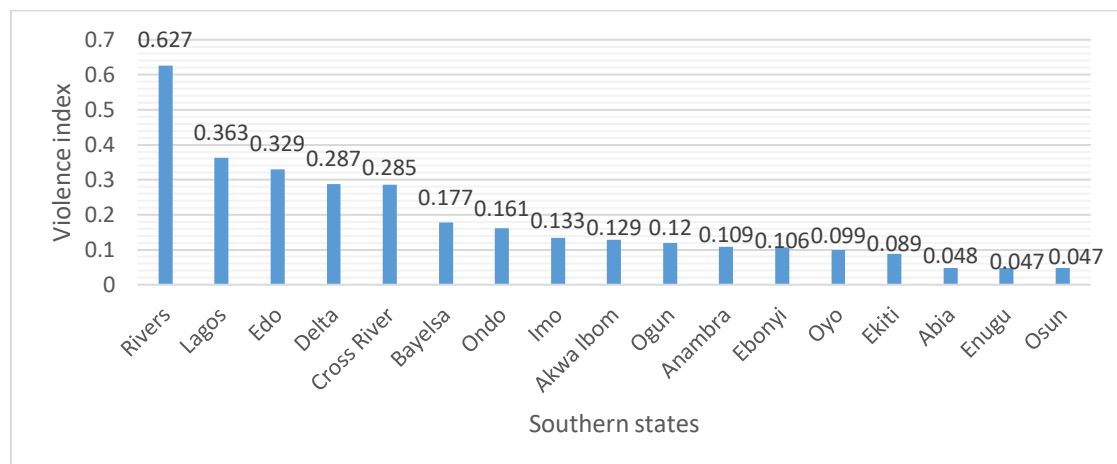
Source: Authors' own, based on Council on Foreign Relations (2020)

As noted earlier, there is growing literature suggesting a rethinking of violence against women in politics beyond the physical to acknowledge the nuances that are often ignored such as the psychological, economic, sexual, and semiotic lenses (see for instance Piscopo 2016 and Crook and Sanín 2020). The secondary data used in this study limited the extent to which we could explore the manifestations of these types of violence. The data set focuses on the context of violence but ignores the types. Specifically, the data set measures fear of violence in the home (domestic violence), in the neighbourhood, at political events, during public protests, and by extremists. In each of these contexts, violence can take any form. For example, domestic violence can go from physical to psychological and/or sexual. Given this conceptual limitation in the data, we measured violence only at the level of context where the acts took place.

3.5 Religious and cultural norms

Religion and culture have always played a role in politics, including influencing women's political participation. Their influence on women's political participation results from their role in modulating women's public agency. For example, in India the effect of education which generally increases the tendency of Indian women to contest elective public office is lower in predominantly Muslim districts (Bhalotra *et al.* 2013). In a study of several African countries, Isaksson *et al.* (2014) found that religious and traditional gender norms inhibit women's participation in some contexts. In Nigeria, Kelly (2019) reports that religious and traditional norms reinforce practices which inhibit women's political participation. Orji *et al.* (2018) observe that some Nigerian political parties build their

functionalities around religious and cultural norms, thereby enshrining some forms of gender roles. By doing this, these parties restrict women to ceremonial and support roles, excluding them from core political issues and decisions.

The nexus is not clear cut in Nigeria though, although religious norms are generally found to negatively influence women's political participation, Dim and Asomah (2019) found that a Christian religious affiliation significantly enhances Nigerian women's political participation. However, cultures and religions moderated by patriarchy usually privilege men in leadership positions over women (Orji *et al.* 2018). Within such patriarchal contexts, like in most Nigerian societies, women's representation in elective public office is negatively affected (Pyeatt and Yanus 2017). Also, in a culture that considers women as primarily home makers, the political participation opportunities that could have arisen from women's participation in paid employment are often neutralised by the burden of home making (Orji *et al.* 2018).

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4. Defining dependent and independent variables

This paper explores the predictors of women's political participation in Nigeria following the north–south dichotomy. We measure women's political participation from three perspectives: representation in political institutions; participation in the electoral process; and civic action. First, for representation in political institutions, we used the 2019 General Elections candidate lists released by INEC to measure the share of women as candidates and elected public officers in the elections.[2] Nigeria's General Elections comprise presidential, senatorial and federal representatives, gubernatorial and state representative elections. Next, due to the unavailability of the 2019 voting statistics, we used the 2015 presidential and parliamentary voting statistics to measure the gender gap in voting in Northern and Southern Nigeria. The first two stages of the analysis were descriptive, using frequency and proportion.

We based our measurement of participation in the electoral process and civic action on data from Afrobarometer's 2018 Nigeria Round 7 survey.[3] The survey was based on a nationally representative sample of 1,600 respondents from Nigeria's 36 states and the FCT and included 798 women participants. The three aspects of participation in the electoral process we measured were voting, working for a candidate, and attending campaign events. Voting was measured using seven indicators: you voted in the elections (7); you were prevented from voting (6); you did not vote because your name was not in the register (5); you could not find the polling station (4); you did not vote for some other reason (3); you did not have time to vote (2); and you decided not to vote (1). Working for a candidate and attending political campaign rallies have yes/no responses. Women's claims making was measured by responses in relation to questions on 11 actions: contacted local government councillor; contacted Member of Parliament (MP); contacted official of a government agency; contacted political party official; contacted traditional leader; contacted religious leader; joined others in your community to request action from government; contacted the media by calling a radio programme or writing a letter to a newspaper; contacted a government official to ask for help or to make a complaint; refused to pay a tax or fee to the government in the past year; and participated in a demonstration or

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[2] We could not account for the impact of violence on women's representation in political institutions, as the data we used is not disaggregated down to electoral units such as constituency and ward. This makes it impossible to ascertain if the level of women's participation in political institutions varies between areas with high and low violence rates.

[3] The survey has no variable for participation in political institutions, hence the use of INEC data. The resultant problem is that, since the two data sets do not connect, only descriptive representation of women in political institutions is possible.

protest march. Each action was measured on a range from 0 to 3 (0=never, 1=once; 2=few times; 3=often) and were computed to create a 33-point scale claims making variable.[4] This second part of the study was analysed using frequency and percentage, and multiple regression. Differences in all the variables of interest were explored with frequency and percentage while a multiple regression was run to ascertain their influence in explaining the dependent variables.

Six independent variables from the Afrobarometer survey (Afrobarometer 2019) were included in the multiple regression analysis. Their inclusion was informed by conclusions drawn from the literature review (see section 3) about their potential to influence women's political participation. The variables are educational attainment coded on a scale of 0 to 9 from 'no formal education' to 'completion of a postgraduate degree'). The violence variable is in five parts. The first two, 'fear of domestic violence' and 'fear of neighbourhood violence' were measured on a scale of 0 to 4 from 'never feared the violence' to 'always feared the violence'. The other three, 'fear of violence at political event', 'fear of violence during public protest', and 'fear of violence by extremists' were measured on a scale of 0 to 2 with 'never feared nor experienced the violence' coded as 0; 'feared but didn't experience' coded as 1; and 'feared and experienced' coded as 2. 'Being Christian' (Christian=1; other religions=0) and 'employment status' (employed=1; not employed=0) were coded as dichotomous variables, while 'control over earnings' was coded on a scale of 0 to 7 from 'have complete control over earnings' to 'have no form of control over earnings'. 'Leadership gender preference' was also coded as a dichotomous variable with 'preferred gender equality in leadership' coded as 1 and 'preferred men's leadership' or 'have no opinion' coded as 0.

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4   Critiques of computed variables are concerned about the arbitrary assignment of values. To avoid this pitfall, we retained the original weight used in the survey when computing the claims making variable. The variables computed were originally measured on the same range of 0 to 3.

5. Women's political participation in Northern and Southern Nigeria

5.1 Representation in political institutions

The contest for elective offices in Nigeria's 2019 General Election was dominated by men. Nevertheless, women were also visible in the race. Table 5.1 presents the gender distribution of candidates in the election. Of the 73 candidates for president, 67 were men and 6 were women, and of the running mates, 51 were men and 22 were women.

Table 5.1 Nigerian men and women who contested elective offices in 2019[5]

Office	North		South	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Governorship	536	35	448	45
Deputy governorship	486	85	303	190
Senatorial	912	87	751	147
Federal Representatives	2,268	164	1,789	434
House of Assembly	6,487	561	6,257	1,308
Total	10,689 (92%)	932 (8%)	9,548 (81.8%)	2,124 (18.2%)

Source: Authors' own, based on Independent National Electoral Commission (2019)

For all elective offices, there were more southern women who contested compared to their northern counterparts. It is only in the elections for state governors that the numbers of southern and northern women candidates are close. Although the level of women candidacy is low in both regions, the information presented in Table 5.1 reveals that the south produced three times as many candidates as the north produced in the 2019 General Elections.

Are southern women more likely to be voted into elective office due to the higher number of candidates? Table 5.2 presents the gender distribution of the winners in the five election categories.

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[5]   Presidential aspirants and their running mates were excluded from this analysis as the focus is on offices for whose occupancy the state or region of origin is a criterion. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 does not recognise regionalism of presidency.

Table 5.2 Candidates who won elective office in 2019

Office	North		South	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Governor	19	0	17	0
Deputy governor	18	1	14	3
Senator	57	1	46	5
Federal representatives	186	5	162	7
House of Assembly	520	8	433	33
Total	800	15	672	48
	(98.2%)	(1.8%)	(93.3%)	(6.7%)

Source: Authors' own, based on Independent National Electoral Commission (2019)

As shown in Table 5.2, 15 (1.6 per cent) and 48 (2.3 per cent) women won elective office in the northern and southern regions respectively in the 2019 General Elections.[6] In both regions, women are more represented in the legislative arm than they are in the executive arm. Even in the legislative arm, regional gaps are observed in female representation as presented in Table 5.2. The closest level of female representation in the two regions was recorded in the Federal House of Representatives where the north had five women elected and the south had seven. Conversely, the widest gap was recorded in states' Houses of Assembly where the north had only 8 women elected while the south had 33.

Overall, in national politics, women from the south achieved a higher level of representation in the 2019 General Elections than women in the north. While the north had 30.5 per cent of total women candidates and 23.8 per cent of women elected into various offices, the south had 69.5 per cent of the candidates and 76.2 per cent of those elected. In other words, for each woman candidate in Northern Nigeria for the 2019 elections, there were 2.3 women candidates in the south, and for every woman elected in the north, there were 3.2 women elected in the south.

A more focused look at women's performance in the state legislative elections in Nigeria reveals a persistent male dominance. The low numbers of women in the national legislative arm are replicated in the state legislative assemblies. Some states do not even have a woman in their legislatures. Only 22 of the 36 states have at least one female legislator (Table 5.3). Cross River state has the highest number (5) of female legislators. Ekiti has four while Ebonyi and Enugu have three each. The remaining states have two or only one.

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[6]   Women's election success rate in the 2019 Nigerian General Elections stands at approximately 1.6 per cent and 2.3 per cent of regional women candidates for Northern and Southern Nigeria respectively.

Table 5.3 Candidates who won seats in state Houses of Assembly in 2019

North				South			
State	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**State**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Adamawa	24	1	25	Abia	24	0	24
Bauchi	31	0	31	Akwa Ibom	24	2	26
Benue	28	2	30	Anambra	28	2	30
Borno	28	0	28	Bayelsa	22	2	24
Gombe	23	1	24	Cross River	20	5	25
Jigawa	30	0	30	Delta	27	2	29
Kaduna	33	1	34	Ebonyi	21	3	24
Kano	40	0	40	Edo	24	0	24
Katsina	35	0	35	Ekiti	22	4	26
Kebbi	23	0	23	Enugu	21	3	24
Kogi	24	1	25	Imo	26	1	27
Kwara	24	0	24	Lagos	37	3	40
Nasarawa	24	0	24	Ogun	26	1	27
Niger	26	1	27	Ondo	24	2	26
Plateau	23	1	24	Osun	24	2	26
Sokoto	30	0	30	Oyo	31	1	32
Taraba	24	0	24	Rivers	31	1	32
Yobe	24	0	24				
Zamfara	26	0	26				
Total	520 (98.5)	8 (1.5%)	528	Total	432 (92.7%)	34 (7.3%)	466

Source: Authors' own, based on Independent National Electoral Commission (2019)

Although there are generally abysmally low numbers of women, there are more women in the Houses of Assembly (7.3 per cent) for southern states than there are for northern ones (1.5 per cent). In the north, there are 12 states without a single female representative in their Houses of Assembly. Only two states in the south are without female representation.

This analysis demonstrates that women in Nigeria's southern states are more likely to participate in political institutions than those in the northern states. Both as political candidates and as elected public officers in Federal (Senatorial and Federal Representatives) and state elections (Gubernatorial and House of Assembly), southern women demonstrate more visibility than northern women. While we do not set out to establish a causal relationship, the findings suggest that Southern Nigeria is marginally more conducive for women's political representation and participation.

5.2 Women participation in Nigeria's electoral process

Having established that southern women are more visible in political institutions in Nigeria, we turn to women's participation as voters in the electoral process and as participants in civic action. Data from the INEC shows that out of the 84,000,084 registered voters for the 2019 General Election, there were more women (53 per cent) than men (47 per cent). However, not all registered voters voted during the election; only 32.3 per cent (27,324,583) voted compared to 29,364,209 accredited to vote on election day, leaving 2.4 per cent (2,039,626) voters unaccounted for. In other words, voter accreditation figures provide a better overview of voter participation than valid vote figures.

In the absence of 2019 vote statistics disaggregated by gender, we used voter accreditation figures for the 2015 Presidential and House of Assembly elections to examine gender gaps in voting between Northern and Southern Nigeria. In all except five of Nigeria's 36 states (Plateau in the north and Anambra, Osun, Ekiti and Ebonyi in the south), the number of men accredited to vote was more than the number of women. It is noteworthy that only one of the five states (Plateau, 50.7 per cent) where accredited women voters exceeded men is from the north. So, there is a wider average gender gap undermining women's participation in electoral processes in the north (16.8 per cent) compared to the south (4.8 per cent). In other words, more women participated in voting in the south than in the north. Table 5.4 is a summary of the gender gaps by state.

Table 5.4 Percentage of accredited voters by gender in the 2015 Presidential and House of Assembly elections

Northern states	Male	Female	Gap	Southern states	Male	Female	Gap
Gombe	66.1	33.9	32.2	Lagos	60.9	39.1	21.8
FCT	65	35	30	Rivers	57.9	42.1	15.8
Borno	63.9	36.1	27.8	Abia	56.3	43.7	12.6
Kebbi	63.7	36.3	27.4	Akwa Ibom	55.8	44.2	11.6
Yobe	63.4	36.6	26.8	Edo	54	46	8
Bauchi	61.6	38.4	23.2	Delta	53.7	46.3	7.4
Niger	61.4	38.6	22.8	Oyo	53.4	46.6	6.8
Sokoto	60.5	39.5	21	Bayelsa	53.2	46.8	6.4
Kano	59.5	40.5	19	Ogun	53.2	46.8	6.4
Benue	59.2	40.8	18.4	Cross River	52	48	4
Adamawa	57.9	42.1	15.8	Ondo	51.2	48.8	2.4
Taraba	56.9	43.1	13.8	Enugu	50.5	49.5	1
Zamfara	55.4	44.6	10.8	Imo	50.3	49.7	0.6
Kaduna	54.8	45.2	9.6	Anambra	49.9	50.1	-0.2
Katsina	54.6	45.4	9.2	Osun	48.4	51.6	-3.2
Nasarawa	54.5	45.5	9	Ekiti	46.5	53.5	-7
Kogi	53.6	46.4	7.2	Ebonyi	43.4	56.6	-13.2
Jigawa	53.4	46.6	6.8				
Kwara	53.4	46.6	6.8				
Plateau	49.3	50.7	-1.4				
Average	58.4	41.6	16.8	Average	52.4	47.6	4.8

Source: Authors' own, based on Independent National Electoral Commission (2019)

5.3 Predictors of women's political participation

We examined six independent variables to assess the factors that predict Nigerian women's political participation. Table 5.5 presents the frequency distribution of the variables from Northern and Southern Nigerian women respondents.

Table 5.5 Frequency distribution of independent variables

Variables	Indicators		North *f* (%)	South *f* (%)
Religious affiliation		Christianity	105 (27.1)	335 (85.7)
		Islam	275 (70.9)	51 (13.0)
		Atheism/no religion	8 (2.1)	0 (0)
		Agnosticism	0 (0)	5 (1.3)
Education		No or less than secondary education	220 (56.7)	87 (21.2)
		At least secondary education	168 (43.3)	324 (78.8)
Employment		Not employed	278 (71.7)	200 (48.8)
		Employed	110 (28.4)	210 (51.2)
Fear of violence	Fear of domestic violence	Just once or twice	58 (14.9)	57 (13.9)
		Several times	35 (8.9)	25 (6.2)
		Many times	14 (3.6)	16 (3.9)
		Always	7 (1.9)	5 (1.2)
		Never/no response	274 (70.7)	307 (74.8)
	Fear of neighbour-hood violence	Just once or twice	63 (16.2)	68 (16.6)
		Several times	29 (7.4)	39 (9.6)
		Many times	15 (4.0)	20 (4.8)
		Always	6 (1.6)	11 (2.8)
		Never/missing	275 (70.9)	272 (66.3)
	Fear of violence at political event	Yes, feared but didn't experience	119 (30.6)	132 (32.3)
		Yes, feared and experienced	58 (14.9)	77 (18.7)
		Never/no response	212 (54.6)	202 (49.1)
	Fear of violence during public protest	Yes, feared but didn't experience	96 (24.7)	103 (25.0)
		Yes, feared and experienced	43 (11.1)	57 (13.9)
		Never/no response	249 (64.2)	251 (61.1)

(Cont'd.)

Table 5.5 (cont'd.)

Variables		Indicators	North *f* (%)	South *f* (%)
Fear of violence (cont'd.)	Fear of violence by extremists	Yes, feared but didn't experience	102 (26.3)	96 (33.5)
		Yes, feared and experienced	52 (13.3)	28 (6.7)
		Never/no response	234 (60.4)	287 (69.8)
Control over earnings		You make the decisions yourself	127 (32.7)	153 (37.3)
		You make the decisions jointly with your spouse	88 (22.7)	112 (27.3)
		You make the decisions jointly with other family members	60 (15.5)	64 (15.5)
		Your spouse makes the decisions	82 (21.0)	65 (15.7)
		Other family members make the decisions without you	17 (4.3)	14 (3.5)
		None of the above/ some other response	3 (0.8)	0 (0)
		Not applicable, no earnings	11 (2.8)	2 (0.4)
		No response	1 (0.2)	1 (0.2)
Leadership gender preference		Preferred men's leadership	170 (43.7)	79 (19.3)
		Preferred gender equality in leadership	215 (55.3)	328 (80.0)
		Have no opinion	4 (1.0)	3 (0.7)

Source: Authors' own, based on Afrobarometer (2019)

The survey conducted by Afrobarometer reveals that for the six independent variables, respondents from the north and south exhibited some similarities and differences. Compared to the north, women in the south had better educational attainment (south 78.8 per cent, north 43.3 per cent) and more were in employment (south 51.2 per cent, north 28.4 per cent). Women in the south were

more likely to be Christian (85.7 per cent) and to prefer gender equity in political leadership (south 80.0 per cent, north 55.3 per cent). Southern women equally reported higher control over their earnings than northern women did. In addition, of the five contexts of fear of violence measured, fear of violence by extremists is predictably higher in the north, the region which has been facing the challenge of Boko Haram terrorism for a decade. While fear of domestic violence also is marginally higher among northern women, fears of neighbourhood violence, violence at political events, and violence during public protest are all higher among southern women.

Table 5.6 Frequency distribution of dependent variables

Variables	Indicators	North f (%)	South f (%)
Voted in the last elections	You were not registered/too young to vote	78 (20.1)	65 (15.9)
	You decided not to vote	37 (9.5)	41 (10.0)
	You did not vote for some reason	27 (7.0)	29 (7.1)
	You could not find the polling station	3 (0.8)	1 (0.2)
	You did not vote because your name not in the register	18 (4.6)	15 (3.7)
	You were prevented from voting	8 (2.1)	8 (2.0)
	You voted in the elections	217 (55.9)	251 (61.2)
Worked for a candidate	No	329 (84.8)	344 (83.9)
	Yes	59 (15.2)	66 (16.1)
Attended a campaign rally	No	323 (83.2)	310 (75.4)
	Yes	65 (16.8)	101 (24.6)
Made claims	Never	38 (11.7)	23 (6.2)
	Only once	249 (76.4)	298 (80.8)
	Few times	36 (11.0)	48 (13.0)
	Often	3 (0.9)	0 (0)

Source: Authors' own, based on Afrobarometer (2019)

From the dependent variables presented in Table 5.6, more women in the south (61.2 per cent) reported to have voted compared to the north (55.9 per cent). Accounting for those who could not vote for reasons other than choice, gives women in the south an additional 1.5 per cent margin over those in the north. Working for a candidate as a form of political participation is low among both northern and southern women. The percentage of southern women who reported working for a political candidate is only 0.9 per cent more than northern women

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who reported doing so. Also, the percentage of southern women who reported attendance at campaign rallies is 7.8 per cent more than the northern women who reported doing so. The percentage of women who have never made claims on the government is more in the north (11.7 per cent) than in the south (6.2 per cent). The number of those who have done so at least once or a few times, is higher in the south than in the north. Nevertheless, only northern women (0.9 per cent) reported making claims on the government often.

To obtain a better picture of how each variable is linked to political participation, we conducted a multiple regression analysis. The aspects of political participation included in the model are voting, attending a campaign event, working for a candidate, and making claims on government as presented in Table 5.7.

The first dependent variable presented in multiple regression analysis in Table 5.7 is voting and only employment status positively predicts it for both northern ($\beta = 0.128$, $p < 0.05$) and southern ($\beta = 0.250$, $p < 0.001$) women. Two other variables, education attainment level ($\beta = -0.150$, $p < 0.01$) and fear of domestic violence ($\beta = -0.122$, $p < 0.05$), negatively predict voting among southern women. Attendance at campaign events is predicted only by fear of violence at political events for both northern ($\beta = 0.145$, $p < 0.05$) and southern ($\beta = 0.151$, $p < 0.05$) women. While none of the independent variables predicts southern women working for a candidate, education attainment ($\beta = -0.12$, $p < 0.05$) negatively predicted it and fear of violence at political events ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$) positively predicted it for northern women. Also, fear of violence at political events ($\beta = 0.132$, $p < 0.05$) and being Christian ($\beta = 0.200$, $p < 0.001$) predict northern women making claims on government. On the part of southern women, fear of domestic violence ($\beta = 0.164$, $p < 0.01$) and fear of violence during public protests ($\beta = 0.167$, $p < 0.01$) predict making claims on government.

Table 5.7 Multiple regression of dependent and independent variables

Independent variables[7]	Voting (β)		Attending a campaign event (β)		Working for a candidate (β)		Making claims on government (β)	
	North	**South**	**North**	**South**	**North**	**South**	**North**	**South**
Education attainment	-0.011	-.150**	-0.108	-.048	-0.12*	-.092	-0.079	.046
Fear of domestic violence	-0.054	-.122*	-0.001	.102	0.044	.098	0.079	.164**
Fear of violence in the neighbourhood	-0.052	.091	0.04	.000	0.006	-.017	-0.064	.085
Fear of violence at political event	-0.066	-.049	0.145*	.151*	0.23***	.116	0.132*	.034
Fear of violence during public protest	0.029	.036	0.096	.053	0.063	.122	0.037	.167**
Fear of violence by extremists	0.056	-.019	0.028	-.021	-0.012	-.014	0.038	.022
Being Christian	-0.015	.015	0.07	-.043	0.043	-.092	0.200***	.013
Employment status	0.128*	.250***	0.035	.071	0.053	.067	-0.074	-.007
Preference for gender equity in leadership positions	-0.021	-.057	-0.007	-.055	-0.029	.062	-0.083	-.052
Control over earnings	0.018	.071	0.02	.081	0.075	.042	0.095	.023
R^2	0.068	0.107	0.065	0.065	0.087	0.082	0.099	0.114
Adjusted R^2	0.043	0.085	0.040	0.042	0.062	0.060	0.075	0.092

Source: Authors' own.

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[7]   *$P < 0.05$, **$P < 0.01$, ***$P < 0.001$

6. Discussion

So far, we have established that compared to their northern counterparts, southern women have more involvement in elective politics. We found the gender gap in voting in Northern Nigeria to be almost four times that of Southern Nigeria. This confirms a shockingly high in-country variation in gender gap, which deserves both further research and policy attention (Isaksson *et al.* 2014). Just as more women in the south voted, they also outperformed women in the north in attending campaign events and making claims on government, and marginally in working for candidates. Nonetheless, the findings reveal as well that Nigerian women are making modest progress, like most women across Africa, in terms of political representation (Townley 2019).

Our findings show that access to formal employment/career pathways is a positive predictor for voting for both northern and southern women, although southern women have more opportunities for employment, supported by increased access to formal education. Education attainment of itself, however, presents a more mixed picture. In our study it is shown as a negative predictor in both regions, with higher educated southern women less likely to vote in an election and higher educated northern women less likely to work for a candidate. Going by the findings, women's political participation in voting in Southern Nigeria is higher among the less educated (Datzberger and Le Mat 2019; Isaksson *et al.* 2014). The findings align with those found in India (Bhalotra *et al.* 2013) and southern Cameroon (Kinge and Adepoju 2014) where education attainment did not positively predict voting among women. Contrary to the findings of Dim and Asomah (2019), education attainment also does not facilitate claim-making on government as a form of civic participation among either northern or southern women. We thus find limited basis for the optimism and the confidence with which existing studies prescribe education as a panacea for women's low political participation in Nigeria.

While existing studies in Nigeria (see for instance, Arowolo and Aluko 2010; Kelly 2019), Mexico (Trelles and Carreras 2012), and Bangladesh (Ley 2017; Paasilinna *et al.* 2017) have documented negative implications of violence for women's participation in voting and politics in general, our study presents a mix of positive and negative implications. In fact, in some cases, we, surprisingly, find that violence was empowering as opposed to disempowering for women's political participation. For example, fear of violence at political events positively predicts attendance at campaign events for both Northern and Southern Nigerian women. It also positively predicts working for a candidate and making claims on government for Northern Nigerian women. Northern women would, in addition, brave fear of violence at political events to work for candidates and to make claims on government. These findings suggest that Nigerian women could be

choosing to stand up to their fears and are willing to pay a price to increase their visibility in politics. It could be that the higher a woman's fear of violence and her perception of overall insecurity, the more likely that she will engage in seeking an alternative to the existing government by attending campaign events and working for political candidates considered as better options. Former Nigeria President Goodluck Jonathan was said to have lost his re-election bid in 2015 because of his government's inability to end the Boko Haram insurgency and rescue the abducted Chibok girls (Abutu and Samsu 2017; Siollun 2015).

Furthermore, fear of domestic violence discourages voting but encourages making claims on government among southern women. Since movement is usually restricted on election day in Nigeria, being at home with abusive husbands may greatly restrict women's freedom and prevent them from going to the polls. Nevertheless, it is common in Nigeria for women in abusive relationships to contact government officials for help. In addition, fear of violence during public protest significantly predicts claim-making on government among southern women. The contemporary example of the women-led group Bring Back Our Girls which engaged in sustained protests for several years to demand the rescue of the Chibok schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram terrorists, and for the improvement of security for girls and women sheds light on this (Ojebode and Oladapo 2018). These are cases where different forms of fear of violence were found empowering rather than disempowering for women.

Religion seems to partially influence Nigerian women's political participation as suggested in some literature (Dim and Asomah 2019). But this is mainly as it relates to claim-making on government. In this respect, we found Christian religious affiliation to be strongly, significantly associated with claim-making only for northern women. The religionised nature of Nigerian politics sheds some light on why a Christian religious affiliation is a significant predictor of making claims on government in the predominantly Muslim Northern Nigeria (Aghedo and Surulola 2013; Bamidele 2018). Northern Christians often feel marginalised because most prominent political office holders in the region are Muslim. The practice of the Sharia Islamic law in some northern states also intensifies northern Christians' claim of marginalisation. Given this situation, it is reasonable to expect that northern Christians who are least represented in politics make claims on government to make up for the lack of adequate representation.

Our analysis shows a clear connection between the variable on women's paid employment and voting, with the level of predictability for southern women much stronger. The literature suggests that participation in paid employment enables women to develop skills that are important to political participation (Hern 2018). This is an expected finding since women's participation in paid employment is higher in the south. Conversely, it is to be expected that the independent variables on preference for gender equality in leadership and control over

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earnings would not predict any of the four dimensions of women's political participation examined. This could be because awareness of gender equality as a democratic ideal is still growing among a large proportion of Nigerian women as our findings show. That a majority of women in both regions lack complete control over their earning suggests that they are yet to experience the financial freedom that is necessary for making independent political decisions, despite most of them participating in paid employment.

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7. Conclusion

A general overview of women's participation in politics reveals that Nigeria is doing far below expectations in engendering its politics as a pathway for more women achieving political leadership. The implication of the findings that education and employment do not necessarily have a liberating effect on Nigerian women's political participation, shows that Nigeria and its leadership cannot leave anything to chance in the urgent need to achieve gender equality in politics. Countries around the world are closing the gender gap in political leadership by instituting affirmative action programmes such as reserved seats and quota systems. Nigeria needs to consider similar measures.

Moreover, the Nigerian case suggests that the little progress that women are making in representation in political institutions is not always evenly distributed. Disaggregating the progress by groups of women exposes hidden patterns of exclusion, which goes against treating women as a monolithic group. Similarly, comparison of women's political participation in different countries without giving attention to internal variations and the factors that produce these variations may mislead policy interventions. This is of importance to governments and international non-governmental organisations when attempting to upscale interventions to improve women's political participation beyond the context of trial. As most conventional factors do not predict Nigerian women's voting as a form of political participation, there is need for further studies to ascertain what are the predictors in the Nigerian context. Improving women's participation in voting will require addressing voter registration and other challenges that make some women drop off the voting process. Lastly, policymakers may need to look beyond the conventional factors when formulating policies on women's political participation in Nigeria. Additional research is necessary to feed the policy process with a better understanding of what explains the varied levels of political participation in Northern and Southern Nigeria since regional differences in the conventional factors fail to explain it.

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