



WHY WOMEN PROTEST: INSIGHTS FROM NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

Nigeria's political landscape has been largely male-dominated, with women having limited access to crucial decision-making spaces. This study aims to analyse the factors that necessitated women's involvement in political protests, the impact of such protests, and how women can be better involved in these movements. The study is qualitative and relies on primary and secondary data sources. In-depth interviews with key stakeholders and activists provided the primary data, while secondary data was sourced from newspapers, magazines, and other relevant documents. The study finds that the desire for gender equality and the need to articulate their views on political issues have driven women's involvement in political protests in Nigeria. However, the weak stereotype of women, the violent nature of protests, the limited representation of women in strategic positions, and inadequate security measures have hampered their active participation. To bridge this gap, the study recommends programs that prioritise promoting the importance of gender equality in Nigeria's political system and amplifying women's voices. In addition, policy implementation to mitigate violence, fear, and intimidation towards women during political protests is essential. Adequate security measures must also be implemented to ensure women's safety during these events. By creating more inclusive spaces in the political arena and encouraging women's active involvement in political protests, it is possible to achieve a more equitable and democratic Nigerian society.

Keywords: *Political protest, women empowerment, gender equality, democracy, Nigeria*

Introduction

The underrepresentation of women globally is a significant issue across various sectors, including politics (Elder, 2004; Teele et al., 2018), health (Richie et al., 2023; Hanifah, 2021), economics (Aurio et al., 2022), scientific research (Maas et al., 2021; Hughes et al., 2023), and corporate leadership (Han, 2020). One of the main reasons for women's underrepresentation is the persistence of gender-based discrimination and stereotypes, which view women as less capable leaders, thereby discouraging their participation in different sectors (Merma-Molina, 2022). This discrimination is compounded by ongoing societal norms that box women into specific roles that do not align with decision-making and are often exacerbated by insufficient financial resources, access to influential networks, or adequate educational opportunities, which limits their ability to public office, gain public support, or achieve political accomplishments (Agbalajobi & Oluwalogbon, 2018). Women's underrepresentation, especially in political leadership, has significant societal implications, including the inability to achieve gender equality and ensuring women's voices are heard in decision-making. On the other hand, women's representation brings unique perspectives and experiences. It promotes diversity and a range of insights into all aspects of society. (Pless & Maak 2004)

Significant strides have been made in recent years to break these barriers using the instrument of political protest (Weldon, 2012). Historically, protests have always led to positive social reform and increased enforcement of human rights. They continue to help identify and defend public space in all parts of the world (Oti, 2018). Protests promote active and educated people and enhance representative democracy by facilitating direct engagement in public affairs. They allow individuals and organisations to express dissension and concerns, exchange viewpoints and opinions, reveal flaws in government, and publicly demand that the authorities and other influential institutions fix issues and be responsible for their acts (Oti, 2018). Nigeria has experienced many political protests. Turbulence, protest, and confrontations have always been integral to the Nigerian structure. In 1960, during the nation's independence and the colonial period, these movements either resulted in an overt change in the system or triggered a larger chain of reactions (Adebowale, 2020).

Women have been central to various political protests in Nigeria in recent years, including the Bring Back Our Girls campaign and the #EndSARS movement. They have used their voices to

demand change and push for accountability, drawing attention to issues that affect their lives and communities. Despite the historically limited representation of women in Nigerian politics, women's involvement in political protests has increased in recent years (Orisadare, 2019), partly due to Nigeria's very young and socially media-active population. Social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram have facilitated the organization of these protests, making it possible for women to mobilise and amplify their voices beyond traditional, often male-led organisations. In addition to using social media, women have organised themselves into grassroots movements to push for change and hold leaders accountable. Women's leadership in these movements has brought more attention to issues such as sexual harassment in the workplace, violence against women, and gender-based discrimination (Fried, 2003). Therefore, this study raises two fundamental questions on women and political protests in Nigeria: 1. What are the motivations for women's involvement in protests in Nigeria's fourth republic? 2. What challenges do women face during protests in Nigeria's fourth republic?

Democracy and the Right to Protest

Democracy, at its core, is a system of government where power rests with the people. It ensures citizens have equal rights and opportunities to participate in decision-making processes affecting their lives. Democracy and the right to protest are two interconnected pillars that help uphold a free and just society. The right to protest allows individuals and groups to express dissent, raise awareness about important issues, and advocate for change. The right to protest extends this freedom to the right of individuals or groups to publicly demonstrate their dissent through peaceful assemblies and protests. This is essential to ensuring government accountability and responsiveness. By creating space for citizens to express their grievances and challenge policies perceived as unjust, protests play an essential role in keeping governments in check. The mere existence of the right to protest helps to ensure that democratic governments remain responsible, listen to citizens' concerns, and adjust policies when necessary (Crane et al., 2004). Hence, protest is a fundamental aspect of a democratic society, as it provides a platform for people to voice their concerns, challenge injustices, and hold those in power accountable. It affords citizens to come together peacefully and respectfully to demand reforms or draw attention to pressing social, political, or economic matters.

Furthermore, the right to protest is enshrined in several international human rights agreements, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. These agreements recognise the right to protest as a crucial component of the right to free expression and a way for individuals and groups to promote and defend other human rights, such as equality, education, health, and freedom from violence (Heyns, 2002). When done peacefully and within the confines of the law, protests can be a powerful force for social progress. They allow marginalised voices to be heard, spotlighting injustices that might go unnoticed. As such, protests create dialogue, build solidarity among like-minded individuals, and pressure authorities to address public concerns. It has played a crucial role in numerous historical movements that have led to significant social and political advancements. (Youngs, 2019).

Governments often view protests as a threat to social order and national security, thereby leading to their suppression through arbitrary arrests, harassment, and violence. Such measures threaten the democratic principles of free expression and social justice, leaving protestors unprotected and unrepresented (Sullivan, 2016). As such, it is essential to ensure that the right to protest is protected and enshrined in law in all democratic societies. It is, therefore, important to emphasise that the right to protest does not entitle individuals or groups to engage in violent or destructive behaviour. It is essential to balance the exercise of this right with respect for the rule of law and the rights of others. Peaceful and respectful dialogue promotes understanding and can lead to more productive outcomes. Any threat to the right to protest is a threat to democracy itself, especially in societies where free expression is enshrined in the Constitution. Thus, governments must implement measures that guarantee citizens' rights to peaceful assembly and protest while ensuring these protests do not undermine public safety and national security (Hamilton et al., 2001). A balance must be struck, and government reactions to protests should be guided by peace, justice, and the rule of law.

From Aba Women Riot to #EndSARS

Women have played crucial roles in political protests throughout Nigeria's history, from the Aba Women's Riot of 1929 to more recent movements like #EndSARS. These protests highlight Nigerian women's resilience and determination and shed light on their contributions to social and political change. The Aba Women's Riot of 1929 was a landmark event led by Igbo women in

southeastern Nigeria. This significant uprising marked a pivotal moment in the struggle against colonial oppression and the fight for women's rights. Also known as the Aba Women's Revolt or Ogu Umunwanyi, the riot occurred in the rural areas of eastern Nigeria, primarily among the Igbo-speaking communities, between November and December of 1929. It was a response to the British colonial administration's imposition of a new system of direct taxation. At the time, colonial authorities introduced a series of policies and practices that adversely affected the lives of local populations, particularly women. These policies included indiscriminate taxation, the erosion of women's economic autonomy, and the imposition of warrant chiefs as local authorities, all contributing to increasing economic hardships and the erosion of traditional power structures (Brown, 2011). Igbo women, who held significant economic and cultural influence within their communities, were deeply affected by the oppressive measures and perceived them as infringements on their autonomy, dignity, and rights. Led by prominent women and market traders, such as Nwanyereuwa and Ikonna, thousands of women organised and mobilised themselves in a coordinated protest against the colonial administration (Ezenwa, 2017).

The women utilised various tactics to voice their grievances and assert their power. They organised marches, public assemblies, and sit-ins, singing protest songs and engaging in symbolic acts to demonstrate their unity and defiance (Strutton, 2014). They also employed traditional practices such as "sitting on a man" to shame and challenge male collaborators with the colonial authorities. The riot and subsequent protests had significant consequences. The women's resistance led to the removal of corrupt warrant chiefs and the restructuring of local administration. It also exposed the exploitative nature of colonial policies and paved the way for future political mobilisation and anti-colonial movements in Nigeria. Moreover, the Aba Women's Riot became an emblematic event in the struggle for women's rights and social justice within Nigeria and across Africa. It highlighted women's resilience, strength, and political agency, challenging gender stereotypes and providing a foundation for future women's movements in the country. The legacy of the Aba Women's Riot can still be felt today as it serves as a source of inspiration and a powerful reminder of the significance of women's contributions to social and political change. The event has been commemorated and celebrated as a symbol of women's empowerment and resistance against oppression in Nigeria and beyond.

Protests by Abeokuta market women in 1948 came almost two decades after the Aba riots. Women protested over colonial taxation and the traditional authorities' inability to safeguard their interests by opposing the colonial masters. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, who was the headteacher at Abeokuta Grammar School at the time, learned about the women's struggle and formed the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU), in which elite Abeokuta ladies joined in solidarity with the market women of Egbaland to work together to find a way to end this practice of excessive and unnecessary tax collection. This women's organisation raised concerns about the autocratic and arbitrary nature of decision-making by the sole Native Authority and the colonial administration (Abdul et al., 2011). This evolved into a movement that was a vital component of the independence movement. Due to this growth, women were also able to establish a clear voice in challenging the impact of current policies on their standard of living and status. These women utilised many cultural traditions to threaten authority and bring about the change they sought in women's positions. In the instance of the Abeokuta demonstration, ladies bared their bodies naked at the Oba's palace, which is a Yoruba taboo. This finally resulted in the Alake abdicating the throne for a while.

The various roots for women's liberation, equality, and empowerment were first built via anti-colonial resistance actions, such as the creation of the National Women's Union (NWU), the first national women's organisation, in 1947. It was also Nigeria's first women's group, with nationwide representation across ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic boundaries. The Union had renowned female leaders such as Margaret Ekpo and Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, who helped to carve out a political space for Nigerian women through their active participation in mainstream political movements and individual female organisations (Abdul et al., 2011).

Women in the Niger Delta region, for example, have been very vocal and resourceful in raising awareness of the discrimination, dehumanisation, and injustice that exists in that region. The Niger Delta region comprises nine Nigerian states: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers. Groups such as the Federation of Ogoni Women Association, founded in the early 1990s, have been visible in the struggle against multinational oil companies. During a three-year campaign launched by the former Nigerian military administration in 1993, women were subjected to rape, assault, burning, beatings, and torture, among other things. For all of these abuses, the Ogoni women spearheaded a struggle against the government (Welch, 1995).

Nigerian women have continued to engage in political protests in contemporary times. One such was the Bring Back Our Girls (#BringBackOurGirls) Movement. BBOG is one of Nigeria's extreme acts, powered by social media and women-guided. It appeared in April 2014 after the abduction of 276 school girls from Government Girls High School Chibok, Borno State, North-East Nigeria, by the militant terrorist organisation Boko Haram (PASGR, 2019). In particular, the BBOG movement is essential because it created a breach in the complacency with which violence against women occurs. The movement was a convergence point for creating a sustained alliance of political figures, actors, young advocates, students, human rights organisations, and other interested Nigerian communities to encourage the Government to respond to getting the abducted girls back. The movement was led by Oby Ezekwesili, a former government official and Aisha Yesufu, a social crusader (PASGR, 2018).

Furthermore, the #EndSARS movement stands as another example. The #EndSARS movement emerged in October 2020 as a response against police brutality and the notorious Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) (Fagbadebo & Oluwalogbon, 2023). Nigerian women were pivotal in organising and mobilising peaceful demonstrations on the ground and through social media activism. Their leadership, resilience, and determination brought attention to the urgent need for police reform and accountability in Nigeria. Nigerian women were actively involved in the protest, including Aisha Yesufu, Oby Ezekwesili, Obianuju Catherine Udeh, also known as Dj Switch, and a 22-year-old, Rinu Oduala, who was one of those at the vanguard of the protest when video of a man allegedly killed by the Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS) went viral, sparking what became the End SARS demonstrations. She set up camp outside the Lagos State Governor's office on October 7, demanding a disbandment of the police unit (Newspost, 2020).

Materials and Methods

This study is qualitative, as it utilized in-depth interviews (IDI) to elicit information from members of the public who are knowledgeable about the subject matter. Seven (7) notable women were purposively selected, cutting across civil society, politics, law, and academia. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to use an interview guide and follow up on topical trajectories that may stray from the guide as appropriate. The study employed an interview guide as a data collection instrument. The guide was divided into two sections; the first sought to elicit a response to the respondents' socio-demographic information, while the second comprised a set of open-

ended questions. The open-ended questions were categorized by the research questions guiding the study, which were discussed with selected respondents. Tape-recorded interview data were analysed using content analysis. The organized data was grouped into issues that deal directly with the research questions raised in the study.

Factors that necessitate women's involvement in political protest

The need to achieve Gender Equality

It is widely believed that women's challenge of marginalisation can be resolved through protest. The understanding is that the numbers favour women, and such can then be galvanised to achieve gender equality. Furthermore, though electoral participation is low among the electorate, the percentage of women who vote is sometimes higher than the men who come out to vote.

If women understood their numbers, they could influence political outcomes. A necessitating factor is the need for women to start acting and use their voices and platforms to talk about issues affecting their society. Today's world demands independent and fearless women who can fight for their freedom and independence.¹

We do not need to wait for permission to sit at the table any longer; a relevant example is Aisha Yesufu, who stated, 'If they do not give you a seat at the table, bring a mat to create a space to sit. With the fight each day, seeing more women coming up and demanding a seat without the involvement and speaking up, how can there be gender equality? How can the world see the need to include more women? Because women play visible roles in protest today, we have become symbols and progress, so the world must accept us.'²

Aisha Yesufu's powerful statement, "If they do not give you a seat at the table, bring a mat to create a space to sit," resonates deeply within the Nigerian context, where women have been navigating societal barriers to equality for generations. In a country where gender disparities persist in various spheres, including politics, business, and education, Yesufu's words serve as a call to action for women to assert their place and voice in decision-making. With the increasing visibility of women like her in activism and advocacy roles, there is growing momentum towards challenging traditional norms and structures that have excluded women from positions of power and influence.

¹ A virtual interview with Dr. Mrs Oby Ezekwesili 27th of April 2021

² A virtual interview conducted with miss Rinu Oduala 4th of May 2021

By taking a stand, speaking out, and demanding a seat at the table, women in Nigeria are claiming their rightful place and inspiring others to do the same.

In a country where gender equality efforts are often met with resistance and entrenched patriarchy, the act of bringing a mat to create space symbolises resilience, determination, and the unwavering commitment to effecting change. Women are not waiting for permission to be heard; they are carving out their space and amplifying their voices to drive progress and inclusivity. As women continue to play visible and impactful roles in protests, advocacy, and leadership positions, they are reshaping the narrative around gender equality in Nigeria.

Women's involvement in protest stems from a problem that is generic to society. When women understand that their voices need to be heard, articulated, or expressed on particular issues of society, so definitely for a woman to protest, she understands that she has that gender equality stance. So, it can bring about gender equality.³

We have never gotten to that period or space where women talk, express themselves, and engage in civic activities. Women are deprived of taking key positions in society. The need for women to voice their concerns through protest is a necessary factor. Although women's involvement in political protest does not necessarily bring about gender equality in Nigeria,⁴ It, however, brings visibility.

Society, both local and global, has made people believe in the second-class nature of women. This is evidenced from the cradle, where their gender conditions the treatment given to children.

Women have been conditioned right from childhood to believe that they cannot attain leadership positions and are disadvantaged because even right from childhood, the whole leadership process is dominated by men. A relevant example is, 'when you look at many women, they are conditioned to stay at home, be in the kitchen, do various house chores while the boys are allowed to go out, play football and associate more with other mates. Moreover, the guys playing football are learning about politics; they are learning about power play. The person who owns the ball is usually the person who says who gets on the team'. In conclusion, all these are like political processes as one grows up. Furthermore, it is necessary to have women participate in political protests to achieve gender equality.⁵

³ A virtual interview conducted with Mrs Moremi Ojudu 7th of may 2021

⁴ A virtual interview conducted with Dr. Mrs Kema Chikwe 21st of June 2021

⁵ A virtual interview conducted with Mrs Aisha Yesufu 24th of June 2021

It must be noted that it is not in all protests that women take the leading role. Indeed, some have argued whether women should be involved in protests that do not directly affect them. All respondents agree that women should participate in protests on issues that do not directly affect them because, in the real sense, there are no issues that will impact women.

Society is an ecosystem of people in social interaction. 'for us to build a society that is just and inclusive, we find out that even marginalised people require a voice of those who are more potent than them as part of a way of ensuring that the society is socially cohesive and that the coherent in the society enable society to be more resilient and stable. In conclusion, women should participate in matters that do not even concern them, as long as that matter is a matter that addresses the issues of injustice against any other group in society. The more people are comfortable being part of society, the more suitable society can be.⁶

Furthermore, issues that do not directly affect them indirectly will affect the home, the children, and their entire family one way or the other. We should not just participate in protests around rape alone because it affects women. Women should protest on other societal and political issues that affect society because indirectly, it affects women in the sense that their children, husbands, or families might be victims.⁷

When women are not on the frontline in protests, they more often than not support protesters. The integral role of women in protest movements and mass mobilisations cannot be overstated, especially in the Nigerian context, where women have been at the forefront of driving social change and advocating for justice. The effectiveness of protests is often directly linked to the level of women's participation, as they bring unique perspectives, resilience, and organisational skills to the table.

In many protests in Nigeria, women have been active participants who show up in large numbers and take on diverse and essential roles in organising, fundraising, advocating, and amplifying the movement's message.

Women are mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, etc. Women are the epicentre of the existence of every society; therefore, every issue or every situation affects women directly or indirectly. Women should be 100% involved in

⁶ A virtual interview with Dr. Mrs Oby Ezekwesili 27th of April 2021

⁷ A virtual interview conducted with Mrs Moremi Ojudu 7th of May 2021

everything because it affects them. Women should be part of everything in society.⁸

All issues faced affect women directly or indirectly; women are affected in almost all issues because they are wives, daughters, and even mothers.⁹

The feminist coalition that emerged during the END SARS protest is a shining example of women coming together, leveraging their collective strength, and driving impactful change in society. Women's participation goes beyond specific gender-related issues; it extends to a holistic understanding that all social issues, whether political, economic, or social, have ripple effects that impact women in various roles they play in society - as mothers, aunties, wives, grandmothers, and more. This interconnectedness underscores the importance of women's voices and experiences in shaping and driving protest movements. Women's presence and leadership in protests bring a different dynamic, emphasising inclusivity, empathy, and a deep-rooted commitment to social justice. Without women's active involvement, it is challenging to imagine the success and sustainability of any protest movement. Their visibility and contributions amplify marginalised groups' voices, challenge the status quo, and push for more inclusive and equitable change.

The participation of women in protests often leads to effectiveness; this is directly correlated with the success of the protest movement and women's participation. During many protests and mass movements, women effectively take on many roles, from organising to crowdfunding to other vital roles; an example is a feminist coalition during the #EndSARS protest. Without women, it is tough to believe that any kind of protest, whether it directly affects women or not, would be successful. There are no issues that do not affect women; we are mothers, aunties, wives, grandmas, etc., and everything affects us.¹⁰

The importance of empathy and collective action in addressing social injustices is well-known across the globe. There is a strong tradition of solidarity with those facing oppression or injustice, even if it may not directly impact us personally. The idea of a "protest of empathy" is compelling. It emphasises that we should not wait for injustice to knock on our doorsteps before we raise our voices in protest. By showing up and speaking out in support of others, we communicate that any form of injustice affects us all and that we are united in our commitment to justice and equality.

⁸ A virtual interview conducted with Barrister Titilope Anifowose 10th of May 2021

⁹ A virtual interview conducted with Dr. Mrs Kema Chikwe 21st of June 2021

¹⁰ A virtual interview conducted with Miss Rinu Oduala 4th of May 2021

The thing about the protest is that you do not have to wait for something to affect you before you participate in that protest. If we only leave protests to people that it affects, not many people will be able to come out, and if many people do not, it will embolden the people who are doing those wrong things to continue to do them.' There is this thing called the protest of empathy. Whenever something terrible happens somewhere, we all have to be there because injustice to one is an injustice to all. It is essential to lend your voice to something before it gets to you so they know not to bring it to your doorstep. Where ever there is an issue, there is a need to come out and speak against it; for example, looking at the #EndSARS protest, #EndSARS protest mainly was a protest of survival, where people whom it had affected one way or another were the ones who mainly were coming out. We should always lend our voices whenever we sense something terrible around us.¹¹

Further, no issue directly affects women; if it does not concern them directly, it concerns them indirectly. If men are making legislation for women in areas that do not concern them, why not women? Looking at the political, economic, and social issues, which area do you think concerns women? We have brothers, husbands, in-laws, friends, etc.; no issue does not concern women. There should be equal representation.¹²

The interconnectedness of issues and the importance of equal representation, particularly in the context of women's involvement in addressing Nigeria's political, economic, and social challenges, is fundamental. Women's experiences, perspectives, and voices are essential in shaping policies and decisions that impact their lives and communities, yet historically, they have often been underrepresented in decision-making processes. Regarding political, economic, and social issues, numerous areas directly or indirectly concern women in Nigeria. From gender equality and women's rights to healthcare, education, employment, and ending gender-based violence, women have a stake in a wide range of issues that affect not only them but also their families, communities, and society at large.

Demonstration of Right

Protests are a fundamental expression of the right to freedom of assembly and speech. They provide a platform for individuals to voice their opinions, advocate for change, and hold those in power accountable. In a democratic society, peacefully protesting fosters dialogue, promotes social progress, and ensures that diverse voices are heard. By participating in protests, individuals can

¹¹ A virtual interview conducted with Mrs Aisha yesufu 24th of June 2021

¹² A virtual interview conducted with Dr. Mrs Oluwatoyin 15th of July 2021

highlight important issues, raise awareness about various causes, and mobilise support for social change. This demonstration of rights empowers individuals to make their voices heard and catalyses more enormous societal transformations.

The protest has been about demanding a specific demand for social, political, economic change, etc.' 'protest makes change happen, and political protest has always been about grievances, tied to inequality, bad governance, corruption, violence from security forces, etc.' in conclusion, 'Been a Nigerian alone, motivates me to participate in a protest because this is about my future, this is about my country, this is about my people.'¹³

The passion for change and the drive to hold those in power accountable are at the core of many movements in Nigeria, showcasing a commitment to building a more just and equitable society. Individuals in Nigeria demonstrate their agency and resilience in the face of adversity by engaging in peaceful protests. They are willing to challenge the status quo, fight against oppression, and strive for a more inclusive and democratic nation. The spirit of unity and solidarity that often emerges during these protests highlights the strength of community and the power of collective action in effecting meaningful change.

The primary factor that motivates me to participate in political protests is that my voice needs to be heard. I have been an active citizen; at age 40, I decided not to be silent anymore because being silent is also part of the problem. Keeping silent and not voicing dissatisfaction at the things happening is as good as enabling an environment for those bad things to keep happening. As a child growing up, I did not like Nigeria because so many things were done wrongly, things were terrible, corruption was going on, and there was no good quality education. If you were poor, you were treated as faceless, nameless, and voiceless; you were not seen as a human being. I would not say I liked all of those. Women protest because they need to pour out their minds, and their voices need to be heard.¹⁴

The Need for Social Change

A necessitating factor is a passion for change; protest stems from a desire to change its environment. Women should not just protest alone; they should change their dynamics and become more acquainted with the country's ongoing politics. 'As a woman, you should get involved in

¹³ A virtual interview conducted with Miss Rinu Oduala 4th of May 2021

¹⁴ A virtual interview conducted with Dr. Mrs Kema Chikwe 21st of June 2021

political meetings and decision-making at all legislative or executive levels.¹⁵

The need for social change has been a compelling reason for women's active involvement in protests throughout history. Women often find themselves at the forefront of social movements due to their firsthand experiences with various forms of inequality, discrimination, and marginalisation. Their protest participation is driven by a desire to challenge existing power structures, advocate for gender equality, and push for meaningful societal reforms. It serves as a powerful catalyst for addressing issues such as gender-based violence, unequal access to opportunities, reproductive rights, and gender stereotypes. Women advance their rights and well-being by raising their voices, demanding change and contributing to a more just and equitable society.

Protests have historically served as a powerful tool for demanding change and addressing grievances related to inequality, governance, corruption, and human rights violations. They provide a platform for voices to be heard and for issues to be brought to the forefront of national discourse. As Nigerian women, the call to participate in protests is a matter of personal conviction and a reflection of a collective desire for a better future for the country and its people.

Concern for Other Women

Women often join protests to stand in solidarity with those who have been marginalised, oppressed, or discriminated against. This sense of sisterhood and empathy drives them to advocate for the rights and well-being of all women, especially those facing intersecting forms of discrimination based on factors like race, class, sexuality, or disability. By voicing their concerns and amplifying the experiences of marginalised women, protesters seek to create a more inclusive and equitable society for all. Through their involvement in protests, women demonstrate a deep commitment to uplifting and empowering each other. They create spaces for solidarity, mutual support, and collective action, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose among diverse groups of women.

Being privileged in my education has indeed enlightened me. It has given me the knowledge and exposure to understand the importance of protest and the significance of using my voice to speak out. Moreover, I am grateful for

¹⁵ A virtual interview conducted with Mrs Moremi Ojudu 7th of May 2021

the privilege of being raised by parents who instilled in me the value of using my advantages to advocate for those who may not have the same opportunities. My voice, amplified by my education and upbringing, is responsible for standing up for those whose voices may not be heard as loudly or clearly. By leveraging my privilege, I can help amplify the voices of marginalised individuals and communities, lending power and visibility to causes that deserve attention. A deep sense of shared humanity with others drives me. I firmly believe that what affects one of us affects all of us. This recognition of our interconnectedness inspires me to use my education, privilege, and voice to advocate for social justice, equality, and positive change to support a more just and equitable society.¹⁶

Furthermore, I saw a Nigeria that works for everyone, fighting for the unborn generation to meet a great nation when they come to Nigeria. I wished others had fought for me before I came to Nigeria. Ensuring that another child born in Nigeria does not have to face all the problems I faced will be satisfying, and it is worth it. We do not have to ask for a seat at the table; we should create our table, and where we cannot, we should bring a mat, sit down, and let our voices be heard.¹⁷

Self-motivation

The stark disparities in power, representation, and socio-economic status between men and women in Nigeria highlight the urgent need for women to actively engage in shaping their communities and country. Despite the significant contributions and potential of women in Nigerian society, they continue to be underrepresented in positions of power and decision-making roles, resulting in policies and systems that may not adequately address their needs and concerns. Thus, the female gender need not be cajoled by any external force to protest their deprivation within the larger society.

Women need not be motivated to be involved in a protest. In Nigeria today, look at the statistics of those in power, the statistics of those on the floor of the national assembly, look at the statistics of those at the federal executive council; how do you expect such forums where men constitute 70 or 90% of the populace to protect the interest of women. Look at the poverty index; who are those at the bottom? The women, of course. When all these factors are considered, women should know that it is essential to go out there to be part of not just the system or those groups of people who complain or express grievances or rant about the situation but be a problem fixer and proffer solutions to issues. When women look closely at these factors, it

¹⁶ A virtual interview conducted with Dr. Mrs Obiageli Ezekwesili 27th of April 2021

¹⁷ A virtual interview conducted with Mrs Aisha yesufu 24th of June 2021

should motivate them to be impact makers, a front liner, and exemplary figures in their community and country.¹⁸

Ways to Involve More Women in Political Protest in Nigeria

In Nigeria, women's participation in political protests is crucial for promoting gender equality, challenging patriarchal norms, and advocating for inclusive governance. However, women's engagement in political activism faces various barriers, including societal stereotypes, gender-based violence, and limited access to resources and opportunities. To address these challenges and harness the power of women's political engagement, it is essential to explore effective ways to involve more women in political protests in Nigeria. This endeavour requires a multifaceted approach that includes addressing cultural and social norms, building capacity and leadership skills, and creating inclusive and safe spaces for women's participation.

Attitudinal Change

We need to have a positive attitude towards women and leadership; there should be a change in attitude towards women's political interests and activities; for instance, when a woman decides to vie for the leadership position of the Nigerian presidency, you see many people talk to her down stating it is the men that are to go in for such positions. It should not be that way; women should not feel inferior towards engaging in societal leadership positions. There should be a fight against women's violence in politics; an example is that of a young woman who wanted to vie for the chairman in Oyo state during the primaries. There was much violence, and they succeeded in posting a candidate over her. We need to fight against that culture; we need to fight against the culture of inequality.¹⁹

Attitudinal change is essential to promote gender equality and empower women to take on leadership roles in Nigeria. The existing mindset that perpetuates gender bias and discrimination must be challenged and transformed. Women should be valued and respected as equal contenders for leadership positions, including the presidency. The prevalent attitude that leadership is a male domain must be dismantled, and women should be encouraged to participate in politics without fear of violence, intimidation, or marginalization. Fighting against this culture of inequality and gender-based violence requires a collective effort from individuals, civil society organizations, and

¹⁸ A virtual interview conducted with Barrister Titilope Anifowose 10th of may 2021

¹⁹ A virtual interview conducted with Miss Rinu Oduala 4th of may 2021

government institutions. We must promote a culture of inclusivity, respect, and equal opportunities for all, regardless of gender.

Awareness and Education

We can motivate women to be involved in political protests by amplifying voices for women's rights and gender equality. More awareness should be spread, and barriers should be broken down. Women can be encouraged to join conversations about women's rights; we can educate women about their fundamental human rights.²⁰

In addition, creating awareness is one of the ways to enlighten more women to be involved in political protest; tell them why they need to engage in a public protest or political protest through that they will know their rights, and they will know they have equal rights as the men.²¹

In addition, women can be motivated towards involvement in political protests through education; education is one of the things that motivated my respondents to protest: historical education of the Aba women riot and how they stood up for themselves during the riot. Proper education, political education, and civic education can motivate women to be involved in political protest. There should also be adequate programs from the government enlightening citizens on their civic rights; it is our civic right to speak against injustice, maltreatment, or any other issues affecting the lives of women or citizens of Nigeria.²²

Furthermore, more women can be enlightened through adequate coverage, news, and radio stations creating awareness; there should be much publicity around protest; that way, enlightenment comes in.²³

Respondent 05 stated that more women could be motivated towards involvement in political protest by being sensitised. For women to be motivated, they must be convinced of what the protest is about; they are to be told that whatever happens in society affects women one way or the other, and they are to be informed that the protest is about their survival. Different media outlets should encourage women to protest through media, empowerment programs, etc. Women can be motivated to participate in political protests by knowing that they have equal rights with men. Nigeria is in a situation where there is no equality; women are treated as if they are not necessary.

²⁰ A virtual interview conducted with Miss Rinu Oduala 4th of may 2021

²¹ A virtual interview conducted with Dr. Mrs Oluwatoyin 15th of July 2021

²² A virtual interview conducted with Mrs Moremi Ojudu 7th of may 2021

²³ A virtual interview conducted with Mrs Moremi Ojudu 7th of may 2021

For instance, for a woman going in for a presidency position, people tell her that she is not fit for that position and that she cannot be a governor or even an adviser to the president. All these are discouraging; they will not motivate her, and she will feel inferior. Equity and equality motivate women to participate in political protest; knowing they can be part of leadership and have the same rights as everyone is motivating.²⁴ Further, women can be motivated when the protest grounds are free from aggressive actions from the government. They can also be motivated when they know their protest will bring positive outcomes.²⁵

Another way women can be enlightened is by mentorship and education initiatives to learn how and why to get involved in the protest. There should be skills and capacity-building initiatives, much support for women's groups and movements, and ridiculous societal expectations of women should be removed.

Promoting Violence-Free Protests

More women can be enlightened towards involvement in protest if violence is prevented in the country; if women can freely voice out their grievances without being harmed or hurt by thugs, they will want to engage in more political protests.²⁶

Political Socialisation

Respondent 03 propounded that the enlightenment of women all balls down to our background; an example was her father, who never differentiated a male child and a female child. It is essential to groom both male and female children from home to know what is happening in the country or around them. Male and female children should be groomed to understand their personal affairs and national affairs; when you are updated about the happenings in Nigeria, you will see that we live in a failed society and an underdeveloped nation. You will see the need to protest and voice your discontent when enlightened.²⁷

²⁴ A virtual interview conducted with Mrs Aisha yesufu 24th of June 2021

²⁵ A virtual interview conducted with Dr. Mrs Oluwatoyin 15th of July 2021

²⁶ A virtual interview conducted with Miss Rinu Oduala 4th of may 2021

²⁷ A virtual interview conducted with Barrister Titilope Anifowose 10th of may 2021

Enabling Environment for Protests to Thrive

Another thing that enlightens women is an environment enabling them to thrive in their political protests and processes. Women are to be allowed to know that they own their voices, and they should not be discouraged by letting little voices planted in their heads as little girls that they can not amount to certain things or that there is a limit to their growth and what they can be. Looking at our country, Nigeria, women have led successful protests. Nigerians should understand that when it comes to protesting, women are more resilient and sacrificial; women should get up and voice out and take Nigeria to the greatness it is supposed to be.²⁸

Men Solidarity

For more men to be enlisted on matters affecting women, there should be solidarity and understanding of how men and women should work in society; it is essential in achieving our shared objectives. We could help men challenge their negative masculinity, discrimination against women, subjugation, and violence against the feminist gender. We could increase communication in matters affecting women to enable allied men to join. Men should be educated at a young age to support women's rights.²⁹ In addition, men can be enlisted on matters affecting women by understanding their roles; men are beginning to understand the issues of rape, and they are showing their anger, stating that the rape issue has to stop. Men can be enlisted through primary means; at their workplace, for instance, policies can be implemented to support women's interests.³⁰ Further, respondent 04 argued that there is no need to enlist men; every sane man understands what it is to stand for the weaker gender. Every reasonable man will be a feminist; there is no need to enlist anybody. Men also get abused, but it is not to be compared to that of women. Women are endangered species, so men should be enlisted in matters affecting us.³¹

Further, it is for the men to understand that women's rights are human rights and that everyone is the same as the other; if we do not fight for each other, we are emboldening whoever is doing such evil to keep doing it. Everyone must understand that whatever affects one person affects everyone; issues should not be placed on gender. Several men are enlisted on matters affecting women,

²⁸ A virtual interview conducted with Mrs Aisha yesufu 24th of June 2021

²⁹ A virtual interview conducted with Miss Rinu Oduala 4th of May 2021

³⁰ A virtual interview conducted with Mrs Moremi Ojudu 7th of May 2021

³¹ A virtual interview conducted with Barrister Titilope Anifowose 10th of May 2021

especially the younger generation of men who think out of the box and not into patriarchal arrogance that has gone on for centuries. We all must understand that as humans, we have inherent and fundamental rights; these rights must be protected, whether male or female.³²

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the motivations and drivers of women's political activism in Nigeria. Through a comprehensive analysis of protests and interviews with women protesters, the study reveals that women's protests are driven by various factors, including economic, political, and social grievances. The study highlights the importance of gender-specific issues, such as gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and equal access to education and employment, as key drivers of women's protests. It also underscores the role of political exclusion, corruption, and economic mismanagement in motivating women's political activism. The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers, political leaders, and civil society organisations seeking to promote gender equality and address the grievances of women in Nigeria. By engaging with women's protests and addressing their demands, policymakers can work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society where women's voices are heard and their rights are protected. The study demonstrates the power and agency of women's protests in shaping Nigeria's political landscape and promoting social change. As Nigeria continues to navigate its democratic journey, the voices and activism of women will remain critical in shaping the country's future.

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³²A virtual interview conducted with Mrs Aisha yesufu 24th of June 2021

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