

Unbalanced Power:

Gender Inequality in Nigeria's State Assemblies





Published in Nigeria by Nigeria Governors' Forum Publishing

The Secretariat

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Maitama, Abuja

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www.nggovernorsforum.org

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To cite this publication: Razaq Adewale Fatai (2024). Unbalanced Power: Gender Inequality in Nigeria's State Assemblies. Nigeria Governors' Forum, Abuja.

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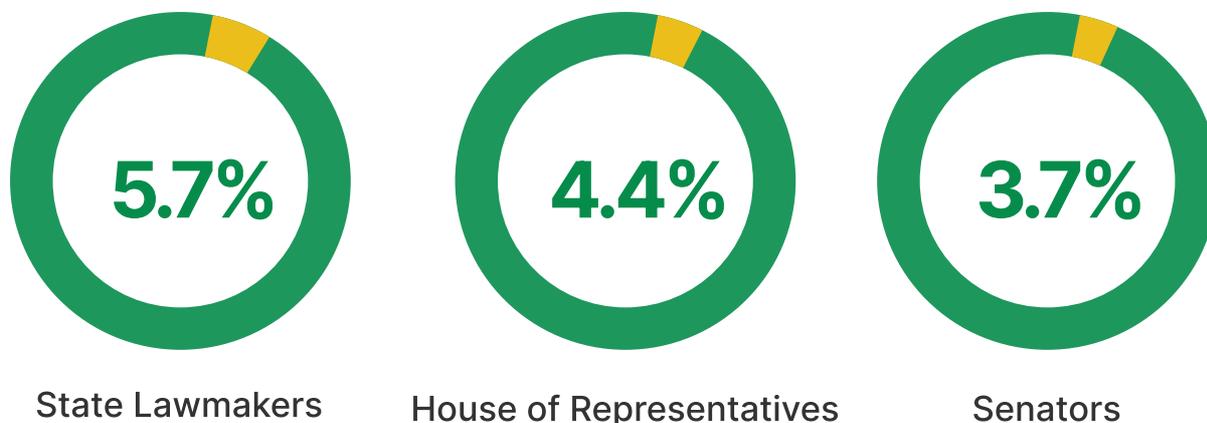
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Overview

This brief "Unbalanced Power: Gender Inequality in Nigeria's State Assemblies" highlights the significant underrepresentation of women in Nigeria's political landscape. Women make up nearly half of the voting population, yet only 5.7% of state lawmakers elected in 2023 are women, which is a modest improvement from 4.5% in 2019. Regional disparities also persist, with the South-South region achieving the highest female representation in state assemblies at 11.3%. However, this still falls far short of the 35% target outlined in the 2006 National Gender Policy. Factors such as institutional barriers, sociocultural norms, and political violence continue to impede women's participation in politics, underscoring the need for comprehensive reforms to promote gender-inclusive governance.

Women make up..



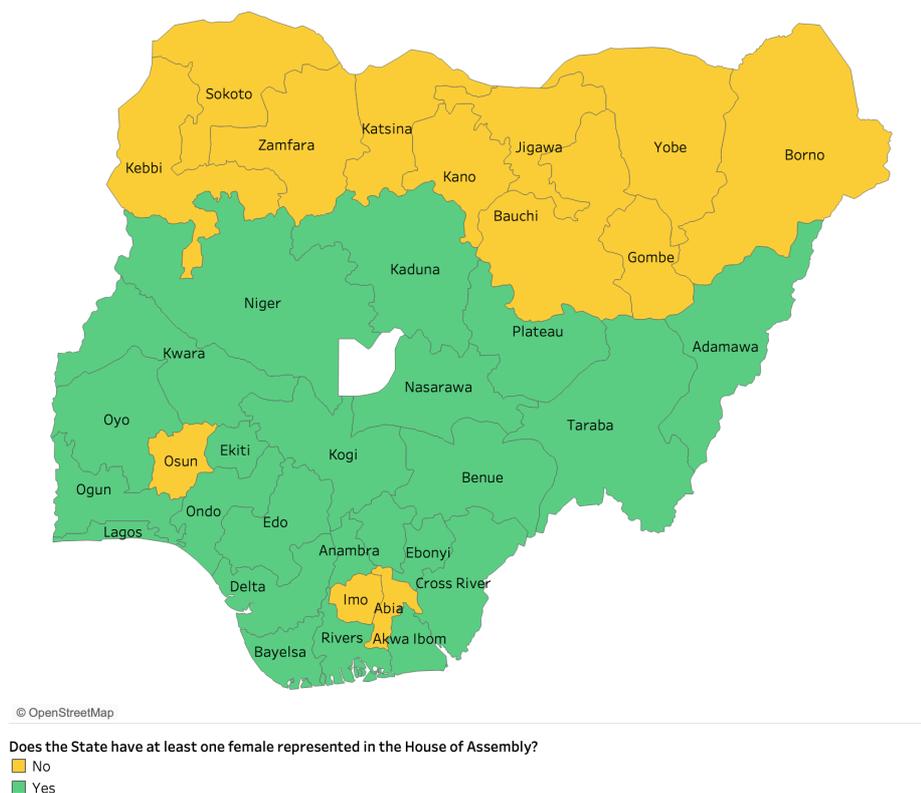
13 states, mostly in the Northern region, lack female representation in their state assemblies, highlighting the need for more inclusive politics.

ANALYSIS

Women Are Largely Underrepresented Across Nigerian State Assemblies

The gender imbalance in Nigeria's political landscape remains a significant issue despite modest progress in recent elections. In 2023, out of the 993 available seats in Nigeria's state assemblies, only 57 (5.7%) are held by women, reflecting a small increase from the 45 women elected in 2019. This gap is stark given that women make up about half of the voting population, underscoring the systemic challenges women face in attaining political positions. Although each region of Nigeria has at least one female representative, female political representation is notably uneven. For instance, only 23 of the 36 states have women in their state assemblies, with the far northern regions showing particularly low representation. States such as Kaduna and Adamawa are rare exceptions in the north, as they have female lawmakers.

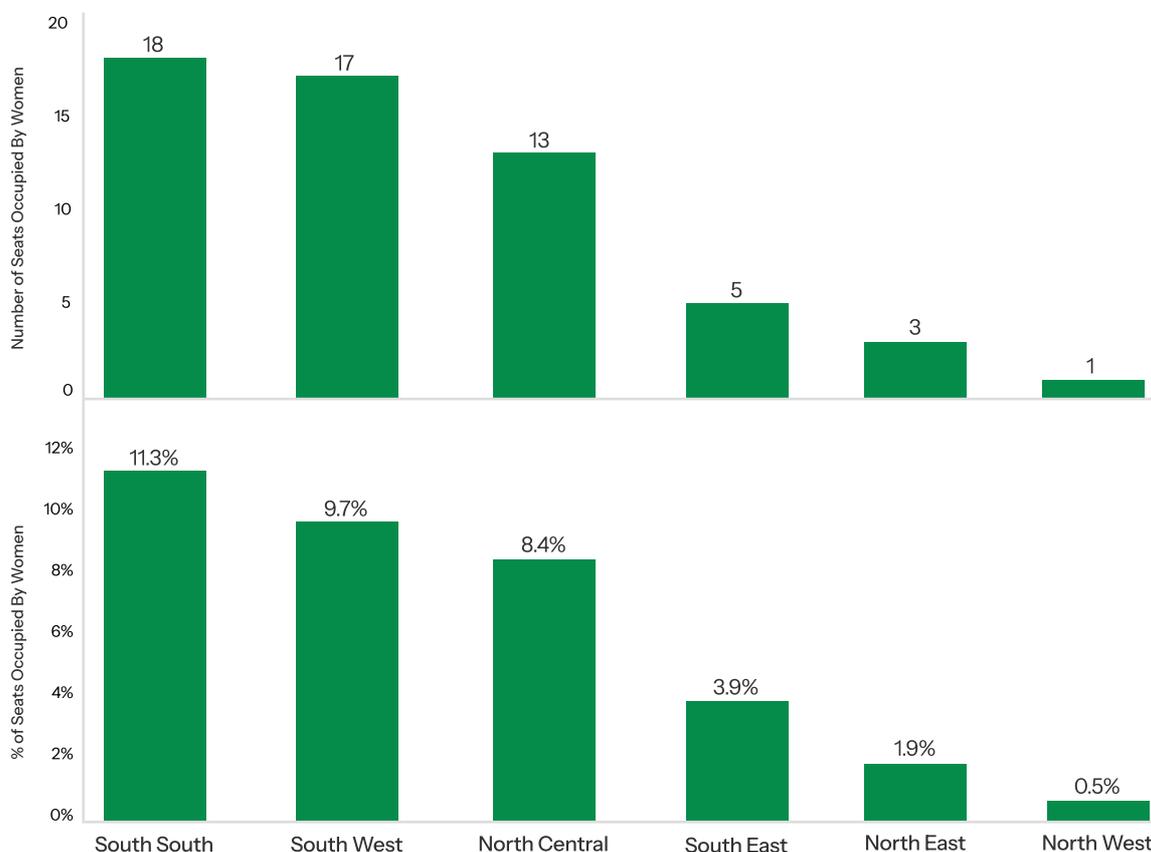
Fig 1: Distribution of states with at least one Female representation in State Assemblies



South-South leads with 11.3% female representation - Still far below the 35% affirmative action target

Each of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria has at least one female lawmaker, but there are significant disparities between regions. The South-South leads with about 11.3% of its state-level lawmakers being women, followed by South-West at 9.7%. Together, these two regions account for over 60% of the total female lawmakers across Nigeria. Following the Southwest is the North Central zone, where women represent about 8% of state legislators. Notably, these three regions surpass the gender representation seen in Nigeria's National Assembly, where only 4.4% of House members and 3.7% of Senators are women. Meanwhile, the Northwest and Northeast have the lowest levels of female representation, with just five women lawmakers combined

Fig 2: Female representation in State Assemblies aggregated by region



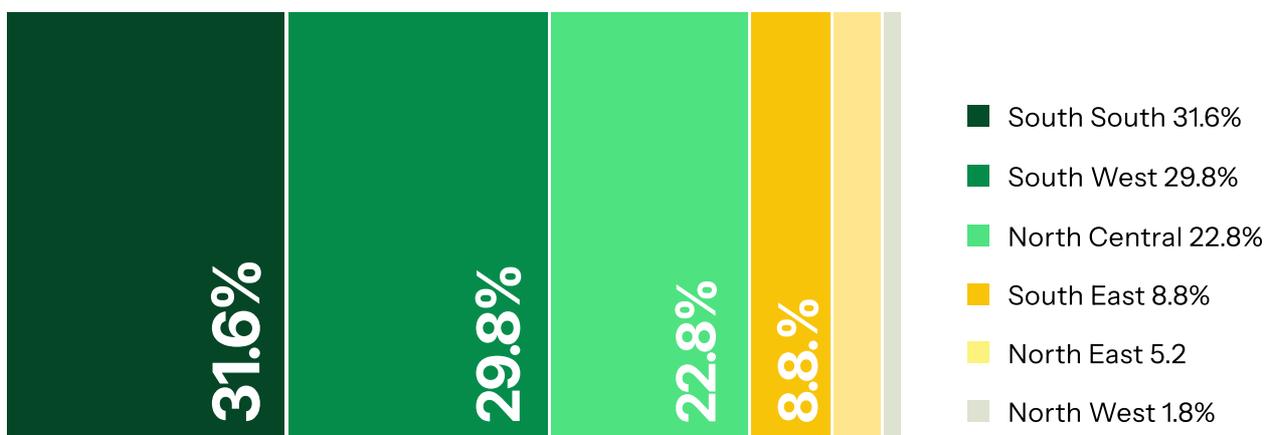
Source: Author's analysis of multiple data sources

Ekiti State Leads in Female Representation in State Assemblies

Ekiti State leads in female representation with 6 women legislators out of 26 (23%), yet still falls short of the 35% affirmative action target—a goal no state in Nigeria has achieved.

On average, states have fewer than two female lawmakers. However, Ekiti State stands out with six women legislators, representing 23% of its total lawmakers—the highest proportion among all states. Rivers, Kwara, Akwa Ibom, and Ondo States also demonstrate above-average female representation, highlighting pockets of progress at the subnational level. Overall, 18 State Assemblies have achieved higher rates of female representation than the National Assembly. Despite these numbers, no state has yet met the affirmative action goal of 35% female representation in legislative bodies.

Fig 3: South-South and South-West account for more than half of the total female lawmakers in State Assemblies



Source: Author's analysis of multiple data sources

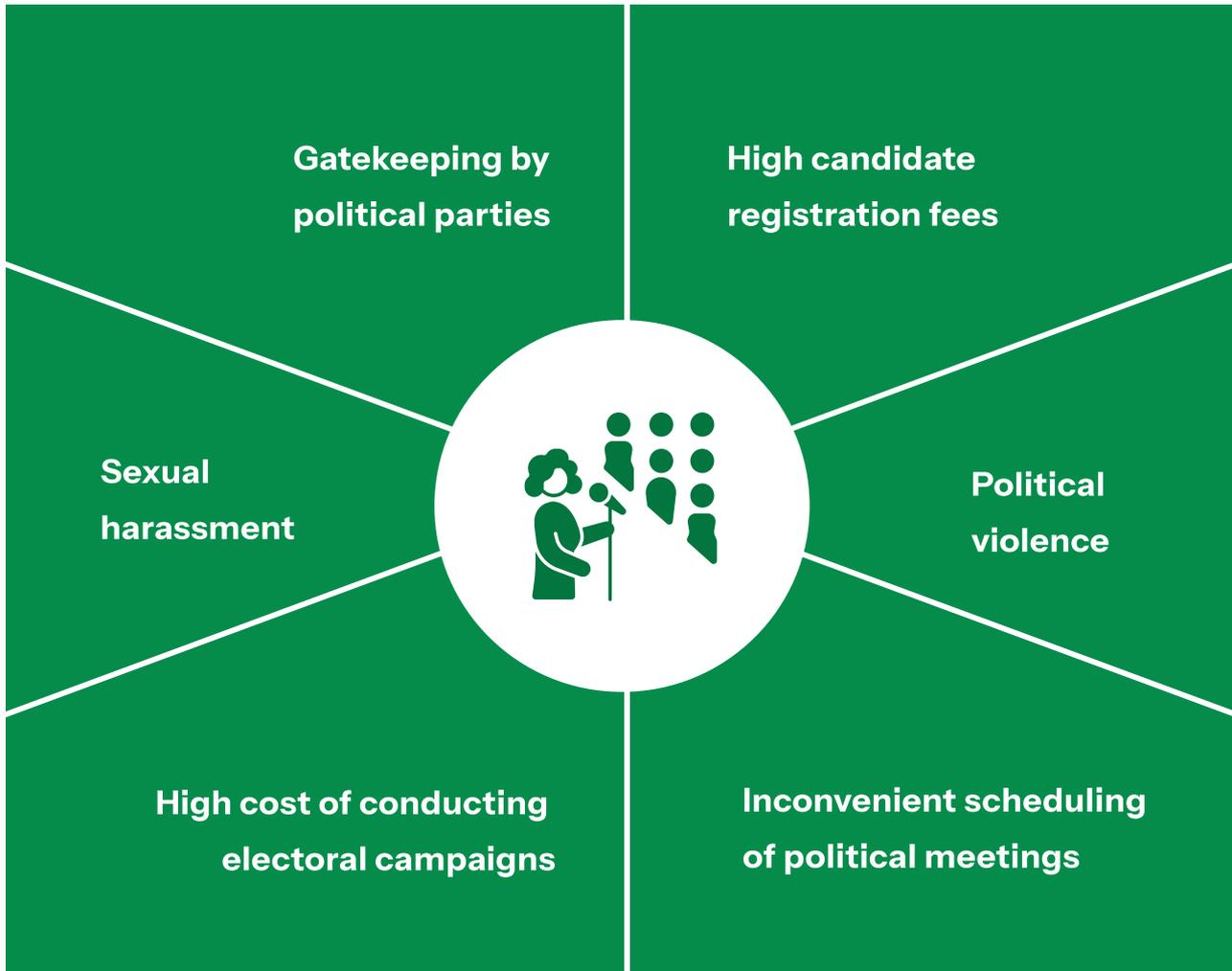
Fig 4: Female representation in Federal and State Assemblies

Assembly	Available seats	Seats occupied by women	Percentage (%)
Ekiti	26	6	23.1
Kwara	24	5	20.8
Rivers	32	6	18.8
Akwa Ibom	26	4	15.4
Ondo	26	3	11.5
Lagos	40	4	10
Bayelsa	24	2	8.3
Ebonyi	24	2	8.3
Edo	24	2	8.3
Enugu	24	2	8.3
Plateau	24	2	8.3
Taraba	24	2	8.3
Cross River	25	2	8
Kogi	25	2	8
Ogun	26	2	7.7
Delta	29	2	6.9
Benue	30	2	6.7
Oyo	32	2	6.3
House of Rep.	360	16	4.4

Assembly	Available seats	Seats occupied by women	Percentage (%)
Nasarawa	24	1	4.2
Adamawa	25	1	4
Niger	27	1	3.7
Senate	109	4	3.7
Anambra	30	1	3.3
Kaduna	34	1	2.9
Abia	24	0	
Bauchi	31	0	
Borno	30	0	
Gombe	24	0	
Imo	27	0	
Jigawa	30	0	
Kano	40	0	
Katsina	34	0	
Kebbi	24	0	
Osun	26	0	
Sokoto	30	0	
Yobe	24	0	
Zamfara	24	0	

Source: Author's analysis of multiple data sources

Key Drivers of Low Female Representation in Nigerian Parliament



According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Nigeria ranked among the bottom five countries globally for women's representation in parliament.^[2] Several factors contribute to the low representation, including institutional and sociocultural barriers. According to previous findings, gatekeeping by political parties, high candidate registration fees, inconvenient scheduling of political meetings, high cost of electoral campaigns, political violence, and sexual harassment discourage women from participating in politics.^{[3][4]} Additionally, clientelism and patriarchal social norms also hinder women's political participation.

Strategies to Enhance Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

Addressing the challenges of female representation in Nigerian parliament will require urgent implementation of the affirmative action for women – a key component of the 2006 National Gender Action Plan. The policy called for 35% female representation in governance structures to enhance women's political participation and involvement in decision-making. While this measure is a crucial step towards increasing women's political participation, it alone will not be sufficient to achieve true parity. A comprehensive approach must also address sociocultural barriers and promote gender equality. This includes creating an enabling environment through capacity-building programs and policies that empower women, ensuring that they not only enter politics but thrive within it.



Conclusion

The underrepresentation of women in Nigeria's state assemblies illustrates a systemic issue that requires urgent attention. While the 35% affirmative action quota is a necessary measure to increase female participation, it is not a standalone solution. To truly level the playing field, a multifaceted approach is essential. This includes addressing sociocultural barriers, reforming political party structures, and enhancing support systems for women. By fostering an environment that empowers women, Nigeria can work towards achieving gender parity in political representation, ultimately leading to more inclusive governance that reflects the demographics of its population.



Increasingly there is recognition that full gender equity will ensure a stronger economy, a more developed nation, a more peaceful nation. And that is why we must continue to work.



Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

Africa's first democratically-elected woman president

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