WOMEN POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN NIGERIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND THE NIGERIAN WOMEN TRUST FUND (NWTF): FOURTH REPUBLIC IN FOCUS

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ABSTRACT
Despite having the most registered voters in the country, the low level of women's political representation in the National Assembly has become concerning. The Nigerian women's political representation currently lags behind the national gender policy standard of at least 35% women representation and other regional and international standards. The study focuses on the role of the Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF) whose goal was to rally support for women and demand the 30% quota granted by the affirmative action policy, particularly in the national assembly as they stood apart from other non-governmental groups. This study investigates the strategies used by the NWTF to enhance women's political representation in the National Assembly. This study used a qualitative case study approach because it captures the key elements of a problem from the viewpoint of the study's primary informants and aids in understanding a complicated social phenomenon, while thematic analysis was used. The finding of this study shows that the National Women Trust Fund employs several strategies, such as guaranteeing quota representation of women in the state house assembly, mobilizing support, providing financial assistance, and raising awareness. The study also discovered that the National Women Trust Fund has improved women's lives by providing financial assistance, capacity-building programs, political mentoring, and raising awareness of women's rights. Thus, it concludes that the Women Trust Fund of Nigeria has impacted significantly the lives of women in Nigeria over the decades.

Introduction

A significant global problem has been the underrepresentation of women in politics and governance. In a democratic society, equal access to political representation for both sexes is regarded as crucial. This is because it promotes political growth and equity (Abubakar, 2015). One of the characteristics that sets democracy apart from other forms of governance is political representation. Anywhere in the world, the foundation of democracy is political representation. Voting is only one aspect of women's political representation in the electoral process; other factors include the freedom to express oneself, assemble and associate,

participate in the management of public affairs, register as a candidate, run for office, be elected, and to occupy political office at all levels of government (Abubakar, 2015). A democratic administration is sure to be more legitimate the more people are represented (Agbude, 2011). Scholars and policymakers have backed democracy as the best form of government in the modern world and as a tool for bringing about change (Abubakar, 2015; Agbude, 2011).

It is alarming how few women are politically represented in the Nigeria National Assembly. Women's political presence in the Nigeria National Assembly is below the UN's recommended minimum gender quota of 35% (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010). According to the available data, the Nigeria Assembly has the lowest level of women's political representation in Nigeria. The Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF), which was founded in 2011 to support greater women's political representation, was motivated by the startlingly low level of women's political representation to guarantee a more significant and constructive development in the Nigeria National Assembly. Enhancing and advancing political representation in the nation, and Nigeria specifically, was the goal of the Act creating the Nigerian Women Trust Fund. To address the issue of low representation of women in Nigerian politics, the NWTF came up to promote increased women's political representation in the Nigeria National Assembly. Because the NGO programs have failed to establish a clear goal of increasing women's political representation, particularly in the state of house assembly, they have been characterized as tokenism.

Other non-governmental organizations in Nigeria, like the National Council of Women Society (NCWS) and the Country Women Association of Nigeria (COWAN), have previously focused a lot of effort on women's political and economic empowerment (Arum & Alaba, 2017). Nelson (2012) was concerned about the number of women running for elective positions in the state National Assembly. However, this article is quite different from the rest because its goal was to review the strategic contribution of the Nigerian Women Trust Fund towards increasing women's political representation in the Nigeria National Assembly. Thus, the current study attempts to investigate the contributions of the Nigerian Women Trust Fund which primarily tries to expand women's political representation in the Nigeria National Assembly.

Conceptual Clarification / Literature Review

Political Representation: Pitkin (1967) defined political representation as the process of giving all of the nation's citizens a voice, viewpoints, and ideas on the country's public policy process, from defining the agenda to implementing it and providing feedback. Political representation, according to Dovi (2018), occurs when political actors or participants speak out, advocate, participate in the political sphere, and symbolize. Political representation in the context of the current study refers to increased representation, particularly for women, using the United Nations' minimum 35 percent threshold. Philip Pettit says that the concept of representation can be separated into two opposed categories: indicative and responsive (Shapiro, 2010). When the representer "stands for" the representee by perfectly exemplifying or typifying the representee, this is known as indicative representation. The person being represented by another person is known as the representee (Nathan, 2017). Just as the representee would act, so would the representer. This is comparable to Pitkin's "standing for" representation; however, Pitkin distinguishes between two types of representation in this context: descriptive and symbolic (Pitkin, 1967). In contrast, Petit and Pitkin describe responsive representation as "acting for" or "speaking for." Petit compares this to a principle-agent relationship in which the representative is the agent and acts under the wishes of the constituent (the principal) (Shapiro, et. al., 2010). Petit distinguishes between approved responsive representatives, known as deputies, and authorized indicative representatives, which he refers to as proxies (Nathan, 2017). Then, those can be separated into trustees and delegates. While trustees have greater latitude in interpreting the representees' wishes, delegates are more overtly guided by them (Shapiro, et. al., 2010).

The **Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF)**: Opara (2015) states that the Nigerian Women's Trust Fund is a non-governmental organization that was established in 2011 to guarantee that there are more women in Nigerian politics. Like other civil society organizations, the Nigerian Women's Trust Fund was founded in response to the decrease in the number of women in high-ranking political and social positions in Nigeria. Its goal is to address gender equality by "increasing representation of women in Nigerian

governance at all levels." Furthermore, according to the current study, the Nigerian Women Trust Fund is a civil society group dedicated to using its laydown tactics to increase the political representation of women in the Assembly.

Theoretical Underpin

Pitkin was the one who initially proposed the theory of political representation in her book The Concept of Representation, Pitkin (1967) offers a thorough example of the idea of political representation. One of the most important and frequently referenced studies in the field of political representation is Pitkin's analysis. According to the scholar, one must take into account the various ways the term is employed to comprehend the debate surrounding political representation. Every one of these variations on the term offers a unique perspective on the idea. Political theorists offer "flash-bulb photos of the system taken from diverse angles," the researcher added (Pitkin, 1967: 10). Depending on how the phrase is employed in modern politics, political representation can either broaden or unnecessarily limit our understanding of representation, which makes it ideal for the current study. Pitkin, the most prominent political representation scholar, asserts that political representation has at least four distinct aspects. These dimensions are a representation that is formalistic, symbolic, descriptive, and substantive. As the following paragraph explains, the formalistic dimension also occurs to capture the current study. Every perspective offers a unique method for analyzing representation. The researcher argues that the many dimensions are appropriately viewed as essential components of a cohesive whole, which makes it most appropriate for the current research, even though there are significant variations among the four (Kurebwa, 2015). The degree to which representatives "stand for" the represented with a focus on symbols or symbolization is known as symbolic representation, and it is one of the elements in the theory of political representation (Kurebwa, 2015).

It appears that this will inspire organizations and women from diverse backgrounds to offer unique viewpoints and ideas to discussions and decision-making around issues that impact them. These theorists frequently stress in their writings that women's interests are not just determined by material circumstances or objective circumstances (Young, 1999; Mansbridge, 1999). Political theorists contend that one of the theory of political representation's shortcomings is its propensity to ignore this conceptual unity and mistakenly regard the various aspects of representation as distinct ideas. Divergent perspectives on representation may also yield disparate criteria for evaluating representatives. The fact that people adopt an incorrect understanding of representation or misapply the norms of representation exacerbates disagreements about what representatives should be doing (Kurebwa, 2015). Most empirical work on representation disregards Pitkin's integrated conception, even though her theories are frequently and favorably quoted. Formalistic, symbolic, descriptive, and substantive representation are some of the aspects of representation that certain scholars, like Phillips (1995), usually focus on while disregarding others that are uninteresting or for which there is insufficient data. This not only adds to "a blind man's comprehension of the elephant," which is Pitkin's metaphor above, but it also falls short of offering a sufficient empirical test of the theory's integrated structure (Kurebwa, 2015).

Methodology

This study used a qualitative case study approach because it captures the key elements of a problem from the viewpoint of the study's primary informants and aids in understanding a complicated social phenomenon. This current paper uses this method because it allows the researcher to have first-hand information from the concerned stakeholders. The current study's inclusion criteria were based on the informants' experience with the National Women Trust Fund's operations as well as their capacity for quick thought and thorough, timely expression. Academics with expertise in the field, women at the grassroots level, and current and former Assembly members are additional admission criteria used in the selection of 15 informants. Thematic analysis was used to follow up on this through transcription, creation of themes, and subsequent analysis.

Women Political Representation in Nigerian in National Assembly: In Brief

In comparison to men, women's representation in the Nigerian National Assembly and their participation in legislative activities are incredibly low and unattractive. Compared to the global average of 22.5 percent, the African regional average of 23.4 percent, and the West African sub-regional average of 15 percent, Nigeria's national average for women's political participation in elective and appointive roles has stayed at 6.7 percent (Eke, 2022). Results also indicate that there are fewer women lawmakers in the National Assembly. In the 9th Assembly, 29 women make up roughly 6% of the total number of members, including the Senate and the House of Representatives, compared to 440 male legislators (Eke, 2022). In the 8th House, there were 438 male legislators compared to just 31 women legislators. One of the most powerful and significant branches of the contemporary government is the Nigerian National Assembly. While some nations have unicameral legislatures, others have bicameral legislatures. Nigeria has two Houses in its National Assembly, which is part of a country with a bicameral legislature. The Senate is the name of the National Assembly's upper house, and the House of Representatives is the name of its lower house. While the House of Representatives now has 360 elected members, the Senate is made up of 109 elected senators, with the president serving as the head of state. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria's Constitution, members of the House of Representatives and the Senate are chosen for four-year terms. However, there is a significant problem with the gender gap in the nation's parliamentary representation, which is brought on by several circumstances (Eke, 2022). Just sixteen (16) women were elected to the National Assembly in 1999, with three (3) serving in the Senate and thirteen (13) in the House of Representatives. In 2003, there were twenty-one (21) members of the House and four (4) members of the Senate, bringing the total to 25. In 2007, thirty-six (36) women were elected to the National Assembly, with twenty-seven (27) in the House and nine (9) in the Senate, setting a record. There has been a consistent decrease since then, reaching thirty-two (32) in 2011, twenty-two (22) in 2015, and eleven in 2019 (Eke, 2022).

Nigerian National Assembly and the Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NWTF): Fourth Republic in Focus

This subsection focuses on the strategic role and the impact of Nigerian Women Trust Fund towards Women in Political Representation in the Nigerian National Assembly

Strategic role Nigerian Women Trust Fund towards Women's in Political Representation in the Nigerian National Assembly

Mobilization: According to Dahlerup and Lenita (2003) the Nordic nations offer electoral quotas, which are frequently optional, never mandated by law, and are only utilized by a small number of the country's center- and left-leaning political parties to promote women's political representation. The link between women's political representation and quota representation was also supported by Dahlerup and Lenita's (2003) study on equal political representation. The position of Dahlerup and Lenita (2003) provides or gives women the chance to be elected, something they might not have had previously. Dahlerup and Lenita (2003) went on to say that the selection process (as well as affirmative action) is the most effective way to address the underrepresentation of women in academia and can address the generally low levels of party representation. This demonstrates that using the quota system to increase the presence of women in the Nigeria National Assembly is possible. According to Okonkwo (2016) in his earlier research, "Gender and Corruption in Nigerian Politics," which contends that mobilization is a crucial tactical instrument for boosting political representation in Nigeria and beyond. The researcher especially believed that, depending on how it is applied, both mobilization and a lack of it can result in a rise or decrease in women's political representation. This indicates that NGOs frequently use mobilization to encourage women in local politics in the country and Nigeria in particular, which is consistent with Okonkwo's (2016) perspective, particularly about the need for women's political representation. This also demonstrates that increasing the state's women's fox mobilization can lead to more women being elected to the Nigeria legislature. In general Okonkwo's (2016) assertion that mobilization is a crucial strategic instrument for

increasing the presence of women in politics in the Nigeria National Assembly.

Financially Support: According to Itodo, Abdu, Dadan-Garba, Ezeayinka, and Asubiaro (2015), states that funding from non-governmental organizations that advocate for increased political representation for women plays a significant role in advancing women's representation in the nation. The NWTF has made financial contributions over the years to guarantee women's political representation in elections for the Nigeria National Assembly. According to Itodo, Abdu, Dadan-Garba, Ezeayinka, and Asubiaro (2015) found that the low political representation of women in the nation's political system was a result of the high cost of politics. The number of women in politics has not changed significantly, even though some political parties in the nation offer free forms for women to run for some of these positions, according to these scholars. The requirement for financial assistance is captured by the formalistic aspect of political representation, which promotes some kind of structure to guarantee needs are met, thus the involvement of NWTF in the request for women's political presentation. The NWTF held that establishing local positions and providing assistance would enable women to enter the political system through a legitimate and efficient process. Supporting women at the local level will help them grow their constituency while also giving them greater experience and confidence, according to a study from the Institute for Inclusive Security (2009). According to the Institute for Inclusive Security (2009), legislative arrangements can improve cross-party cooperation by enlisting women, fostering collaboration, and creating a platform for grassroots women to develop a shared agenda. In light of the above, prior research has shown that grassroots organization support can act as an enabler; as a result, NWTF has adopted the strategy of enlisting women to enhance political representation in the Nigeria National Assembly.

Affirmative Action: The NWTF just like the Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC) has been leading the charge to increase women's political representation in Nigeria, the country's electoral legislation to allow affirmative action and establish a requirement for political party registration, and the findings of Orji, Orji, and Agbanyim (2018), who studied women's political representation in Nigeria, thus domestic lobbying is necessary for the country's gender mainstreaming political system and the inclusion of 35% of women in politics. This position is further supported by Manin (1997) which shows international political lobbying can ensure changes in political representation, and domestic lobbying can help achieve this. According to the most recent research, the NWTF used key stakeholders' lobbying to project a higher level of representation for women.

Awareness: According to Dim & Asomah (2015) educational levels appear to be a barrier to women's political representation. And illiteracy is one of the biggest obstacles to women's political representation, particularly in the Nigeria National Assembly. As a result, NWTF adopted a strategy that would help to improve women's political representation in the state assembly. This they demonstrate through the sincerity of the substantive political representation theory's stance in favoring a higher proportion of women in politics, particularly the part that emphasizes the institutionalization of women's representation. This is Lundgren (2005), who believed that electoral statistics in Nordic countries indicate that women are more likely to be represented in the parliament in areas where citizens from NGOs and other concerned associations are sufficiently aware of the issue, as well as in single-member districts. According to this expert, instances such as Germany and New Zealand are classic instances of the role that awareness concerns have in the political representation of women. Raising awareness can help to ensure and guarantee women's political representation in the Nigeria National Assembly, which is further supported by Lundgren's (2005) perspective. The results of this study are consistent with those of Dahlerup's (2005) study, "Strategies to Enhance Women's Political Representation in Different Electoral Systems," which found that the plurality-majority system used in most countries is less effective than the right awareness system, which helps to increase political representation for women and, consequently, their political profiles.

Impact of the Nigerian Women Trust Fund on women's political representation in Assembly:

According to Shames (2015), who believed that because of the leadership abilities women have developed over the years as a result of NGOs' work, gender characteristics are frequently resistant to feminist critique over time. These results are in line with Alexander's (2012) study, "Change in Women's Descriptive Representation and the Belief in Women's Ability to Govern: A Virtuous Cycle," which discovered that transformational leadership abilities have started to help women take advantage of implicit biases, an unconventional approach to boosting women's political representation, and the opportunity to become political leaders. The position of Alexander's (2012) assertion that mentorship is still the most effective means of advancing women into political office because high-ranking individuals may have an impact on both women's representation. Also, Jabre (2004) holds that NGOs can guarantee increased women's political representation through capacity-building initiatives with the help of foreign donors. The NWFT has significantly improved the lives of women by strengthening their capability, which inevitably helps to increase the number of women in politics both in the state and nationally. Also, Umutoni (2007) showed that women may succeed in unfriendly environments if they are given the necessary tools and assistance, and are supported or agreed with by the NWTF. To Dahlerup and Lenita (2005) earlier the stance backs up NGOs' financial assistance can significantly increase or improve women's political representation, in this example in the Nigeria National Assembly. The ability of women decision-makers to speak for other women is often emphasized by the notion of political representation as an issue of shared gendered identity, which can be accomplished through financial support (Kurebwa, 2015).

According to Kelly (2019) which holds that government support is necessary to ensure and guarantee women's political representation, which NWFT has been very effective in bringing the government's attention to the need to give women, particularly in Nigeria, moral and other support so they can have more representation in politics, particularly when it comes to elections for the state National Assembly. Although the Nigerian constitution (1999) guarantees equal political rights, the National Gender Policy (2006) recommended a benchmark of 35% of seats in parliament in this state National Assembly be filled by women, and Nigeria as a nation is a signatory to international agreements, Kelly (2019) found that the Nigerian government has been reluctant to support and enact relevant laws to improve women's political representation. According to NWTF's women's rights awareness initiatives have had an impact on women's political representation in Nigeria. By including women panelists, the NWTF has fulfilled its right awareness functions and given its members a platform to demonstrate how women are represented in political debates. Intentional action plans can improve women's political representation, as shown that women's political representation may rise if men and women have more political knowledge and discourse (Casserly, 2016).

This NGOs have done a good job of handling laws, regulations, and processes that encourage women's active representation in order to help women in politics. According to the most recent research, NWTF has had a significant impact through her numerous initiatives that educate women about their rights to actively reform laws. According to Shames' (2014) research, advancing women's rights through law contributes to gender equality and gives women and girls a positive message that they have a place in this nation. According to recent research, NWTF's efforts have assisted women in realizing that the state can support their right to legislation and representation in the state National Assembly. Shames (2014) adds that women's rights must be upheld, which consistently supports the results of recent studies on guaranteeing women's rights to laws and the defense of those rights.

Challenges of the Nigerian Women Trust Fund in ensuring an increase in women's political representation

Political challenges: According to Orji et al. (2018), who examined women's political representation and concluded that the godfather's actions have a significant impact on women's political representation generally. In Nigeria, patriarchal patronage networks and party structures are designed with men in mind, which promotes low representation of women and strong male dominance over politics. The

new study supports the findings of Orji et al. (2018), who demonstrated that men control the political system from the nomination stage onward, producing political godfathers who consistently work to deny women their political rights. Activities continue to provide a significant obstacle to women's political representation in the National Assembly. They support Kelly's (2019) research findings that violence during elections, including against women candidates, has an impact on women's political representation. The results of Kelly's (2019) investigation into the obstacles to women's political representation support the current research, which found that the degree of political violence in the state's electoral process is one of the factors influencing women's political representation in Nigeria, particularly about women in the National Assembly. Kelly (2019) went on to suggest that discriminatory laws in and around the state, as well as violence against women, are the main causes of the absence of meaningful representation of women in Nigeria's political system.

Political violence: Against women politicians has taken many forms, from hate speech to physical altercations or threats. The main obstacle to women's political presence in the Nigeria National Assembly is political violence. Therefore, these recent results complement the Peace Direct Committee report, which claims that Nigerian women are singled out in the political arena to guarantee and impede their greater participation in political events like rallies, voting, and/or candidacies. Violence against women continues to rise and poses a serious threat to the nation's democracy (Direct, 2019). However, according to a 2012 British Council Nigeria report, gangs have been employed in some regions by politicians or political elites to thwart women candidates. Inconsistent with earlier research and the British Council report (2012), which asserts that cultural and religious factors influence women's political representation in Nigeria. Their results demonstrate that regional differences in women's representation due to cultural and religious considerations are evident at the state level. British Council report (2012) since it demonstrates that religious beliefs and cultural customs played a significant role in the low political representation of women in the Nigerian National Assembly. Itodo et al. (2015), believed that the nation's cultural norms regarding marriage and Indigenous citizenship frequently place women politicians at a disadvantage and occasionally even disqualify them, even in certain instances, parties have prohibited women from running for office due to their rules of engagement and the type of primary elections that are held, which are typically "indirect primaries" in the selection process that leaves only a few leaders with the authority to select candidates (Itodo et al., 2015; Onimisi. 2014).

Economic barriers: Women's elections usually do not result in more political representation for them because of a lack of mobilization. Lack of mobilization continues to be one of the biggest obstacles women face in their efforts to increase their political participation in the Nigeria National Assembly, according to Okonkwo (2016). The large body of prior research by Kelly (2019), found that lower levels of women's employment and education have an impact on women's political representation in his work titled "Barriers and Enablers for Women's Participation in Governance in Nigeria." The results of the current study reflect Kelly's (2019) assertion that women's political representation is impacted by a lack of educational support, particularly in the Nigeria National Assembly, which is the subject of the current study. Because the NGOs had to balance traditional politics with family responsibilities, provide credence to this view. Rosenbluth, Kalla, and Teele's (2015) study, "The Women Political Career," states that women spend the majority of their time at home and taking care of their children due to the ongoing unequal distribution of family care roles and responsibilities. According to these academics' research, women suffer greatly as a result of becoming mothers, which has an impact on their capacity to hold political office in all election-related roles.

Socio-cultural challenges: The women foxes include other maternal engagements in addition to time and effort. According to Shames' (2014) research, women who are heavily active in childcare would have a hard time juggling their home obligations with political participation, which would make NGOs' struggles even more difficult and disadvantage the women. These results are consistent with those found in previous research by Dahlerup and Lenita (2005) titled "Quotas as a Fast Track to Equal Representation for Women," which held that the main obstacle to women's political representation is their lack of the necessary financial resources to grant them the political

office they so desire. The findings of this current resource, which demonstrate that financial difficulties continue to be a barrier to women's political involvement in the Nigeria National Assembly, are further supported by Dahlerup and Lenita's (2005) perspective. Dahlerup and Lenita (2005) claim that the incremental track concept demonstrates that women's political representation will always be lower than men's because they lack the same political resources. Though the last access to funding appears to be impeding this, political representation theory advocates for women's representation through direct representation in decision-making bodies. Nonetheless, the current investigation is appropriately captured by the formalistic representation dimension of the theory of political representation.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Investigating the role of the Women Trust Fund of Nigeria in ensuring greater women's political representation in the Nigeria National Assembly, as well as the obstacles the Trust Fund faces in achieving its goal of increasing women's political representation and the strategies that can guarantee greater representation of women in the national assembly, was the primary focus of the study, as stated at the outset. Therefore, these goals were the focus of the case study design. One of the more important conclusions drawn from the study's initial goal was that, by providing financial support to women interested in politics and the state National Assembly, the Women Trust Fund of Nigeria has significantly increased the representation of women in the Nigerian National Assembly. Through political mentorship, mobilization, and the inclusion of women in crucial positions within the state, the Women Trust Fund has helped to support better and strengthen the representation of women in the Nigeria National Assembly. The study concludes that women's political representation in the Nigeria National Assembly has been strengthened thanks in part to the Nigerian Women Trust Fund. The study concludes that the Women Trust Fund of Nigeria is a strategic partner in ensuring and promoting women's political representation in the Nigeria National Assembly; however, the challenges faced by the Women Trust Fund of Nigeria in their effort to provide great women's political representation in are financial challenges, political violence, and lack of mobilization. The Women Trust Fund of Nigeria through it activities has been able to provide and create women's rights awareness, improvement of public opinion of women, and assistance in coordinating the activities of women.

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