

## **Political Violence and Women Political Participation in Nigeria: A Study of Ebonyi State, 2015 – 2019**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper, Political Violence and Women Political Participation in Nigeria: a Study of Ebonyi State, 2015 - 2019, focuses on how political violence is a factor for the low participation of women in Nigerian political activities, particularly in Ebonyi State. The study adopted the Radical Feministic theory. The paper establishes that political violence is prevalent in Ebonyi state and it is caused by unemployment, poverty, imposition of candidates among others. It further recognizes the fact that the level of women participation in politics is low owing to ignorance, gender inequality and political violence. It therefore recommends among others that there is need for sustained awareness and value re-orientation campaigns on the importance of politics that is free from violence so that more women can confidently participate in politics and contribute their own quota to national development.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Political violence has been part of human history. Many societies have lived with it; unfortunately it affects women's participation in leadership circles because women are perceived as not a force to reckon with in politics especially in Nigeria. Females constitute a greater proportion of the population in Nigeria; about 49.36% (World Bank Report, 2012) but, in spite of this, they are not heard. Women's contributions to the socio-economic development of human societies are often more than half of the men, by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. Yet, their participation in the formal political structures and processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources (generated by both men and women) are made, remain insignificant (Olufunke, 2012).

Prior to 2005, women's representation in the legislative arm of government around the World was 15% (United Nations Development, Human Development Report, 2005). The pronounced commitment of international organizations to gender equality and to bridging the gender gap in the formal political arena, reinforced by the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1993 and the Beijing Platform of Actions, 1995; had changed the political landscape with the presence of a minimum of 30% of women in the political structure of most African countries, (Olufunke, 2012). In Nigeria, during the Jonathan administration, women had about 35% participation at the Federal level; from 2015 – 2019.

The issue of political participation involves a number of variables, such as voting in elections and contesting elective (public) offices. Explaining this view, Agbalajobi cited in Olufunke (2012) stated that the increase of votes cast by women in elections from 10 to 40% of total vote cast in eight years signifies a form of increase in population. But when the number of women holding public offices, when compared to men is relatively low, there is under-representation. She asserts further that there may be an increase in participation of women and yet an under-representation of women in politics; or there could be high representation of women in politics and yet low participation, depending on the standards used to measure participation. However, in Nigeria today, there is an increase in the level of women participation and yet women are still under-represented especially in elective positions at the local level (Olufunke, 2012).

#### **Statement of problem**

Political violence is an endemic feature of most world political systems. This is particularly true of the developing countries, including Nigeria, where political violence has become an essential characteristic of the political process, particularly after (political) independence (Tamuno, 1972). It was Nigeria's pride that she achieved her independence with minimum disturbances; but, it is rather unfortunate that after independence Nigeria has been gravitating in a spiral of violence. The question one will ask is: how has political violence affected women's participation in political activities in Nigeria?

Women are regarded as weaker sexes; a social construct that relies on social values, norms and beliefs, which have neglected their meaningful contributions and have placed them in a subordinate position to men in the nation's political system. This 'sexual division of labour' in the political system is often traced to the onset

of colonialism in Nigeria. Their Western cultural notion of male superiority reflected in their relations with Nigerians. For instance, the Clifford Constitution of 1922 restricted the electorate to adult males in Calabar and Lagos who have been resident in the cities for at least one year and had a gross annual income of N100.00. The Richard constitution of 1946 only reduced the property qualification to N50.00. The Macpherson Constitution removed property qualification but still restricted the electorate to only adult males who pay their taxes. It was not until 1979 that the right to vote was extended to all Nigerian women. While men started voting in Nigeria in 1922, women in all parts of the country started voting in 1979, a difference of fifty seven years (Obasanjo, 2012). The political enfranchisement of women in Nigerian politics since 1979, seems to have been maintained at a surface level of gender equity politically, because it is assumed that constitutionally there are not barriers to women's participation. Also, one may argue that from the Obasanjo Presidency in 1999 through Yar'dua, to the Jonathan Administration in Nigeria, there has been an increasing accommodation of gender concerns both in elective and appointive positions. Affirming this, Iheuwa (2013) stated that in the spirit of its expressed policy, in support of 30% Affirmative Action for the benefit of women, the Federal Government under President Jonathan, made conscious and positive efforts to take appropriate measures, to reflect a good percentage of women in governance.

Despite all these, Nigerian women lag behind in political power and decision making which is one of the key areas identified during the 1995 Beijing Conference. Women have continually been discriminated against when it comes to politics while the men have maintained an upper hand. The political playing field is uneven and non-conducive to women's participation. In view of this persistent unfavourable political climate against women, this paper intends to examine how political violence affects women' participation in politics in Ebonyi State.

### **Research Objectives**

This study is guided by the following objectives:

- (i) To examine the causes of political violence in Ebonyi State
- (ii) To ascertain the effect of political violence on women's political participation in the State
- (iii) To recommend measures to tackle political violence in the State.

### **Research Questions**

- (i) What are the causes of political violence in Ebonyi State?
- (ii) To what extent does political violence affect women's political participation in the Ebonyi State?
- (iii) What are the measures to tackle political violence in the Ebonyi State?

## **II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Radical Feministic Theory**

The Radical feministic theory was pioneered by Ellen Willis and Shulamith Firestone, in 1969. The theory believes that the main cause of women's oppression originates from social roles and institutional structures being constructed from the perspective of male supremacy and patriarchy. The theory calls for a radical reordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in all social and economic contexts. The radical feministic theory sees no need to compromise with existing political perspectives and agenda of men. This is because it sees the oppression of women as the most fundamental and universal form of domination and aims to end it. It also insists that male power is not confined to the public worlds of politics and paid employment but rather extends into private life. Male engineered political violence is one of the barriers to the emergence of women in politics; often perpetrated to scare them away.

The implication is that contemporary women who have broken traditional barriers in the areas of education, economic, social, political and business ought to rise up to challenge male dominance. Women constitute a greater part of the world's population; therefore they must break away from the gender traditional roles boundaries that prevent them from living up to their potentials.

### **Conceptual clarification**

#### **The Concept of Political Participation**

Political participation involves series of activities engaged in by an individual to influence decision-making process. It is the general way through which the civic activities of the citizen are displayed, and are critical parts of any democracy. As the name suggests, political participation simply means that a person is participating in the political process by making his or her opinions and beliefs known. It is often used to describe an action taken by a citizen to influence the outcome of a political issue (Rasak and Garuba, Nd). According to Norman and Verba (1975), political participation consists of those legal activities by private citizens, which are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and the activity they undertake. This definition emphasizes conventional political participation and excludes

unconventional politics such as illegal political protest, political thuggery, politically motivated terrorist attacks, hijack of ballot boxes etc. Political participation has also been conceived as activities of citizens designed to influence government decision making (Eme and Onuigbo 2015). This definition, in a wide sense, comprises all the activities of individuals and groups, conventional or unconventional, that target decision making process with a view to impacting a change. Anifowose (1999) opined that political participation encompasses many activities used by citizens to influence the selection of political leaders or the policies they pursue. He believes that political participation derives from the freedom to speak out, assemble and associate with citizens towards capturing the machinery of government, ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs and the opportunity to register as a candidate, to campaign, to be elected and to hold office at all levels of government.

In another development, Adelekan (2010) states that political participation is the process through which an individual plays a role in the political life of the society and has the opportunity to take part in deciding what common goals of the society are, and the best way of achieving these goals. It is an aspect of political behaviour and it focuses on the way in which individuals take part in politics. It is a voluntary activity and one may participate directly or indirectly. The various ways by which the people can be involved in the political system include selection or election of political leaders, formulation of policies, community activities and other civic engagements. The essence of political participation in any society, either civilized or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and to influence decision making. Falade (2008) however maintained that cultural, economic, political, religious and educational backgrounds of individuals are some of the major factors that determine political participation in Nigeria.

Axford, et. al. (2002), have observed that the definition of political participation is far from being straightforward and that one problem of the various definitions is that they are more or less exclusive. They argue that the perception of political participation as a voluntary action through which people seek to influence the making of public policy, excludes those forms of participation that are coerced. Thus, they defined political participation as a term that denotes the action by which individuals take part in the political process, freely or coerced, conventionally or unconventionally.

Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995), Goetz (2003) and Chukwuemeka and Eze (2011), have identified political activities to include: voting; campaigning for a party or supporting party work through other means; protest activities; getting involved in organizations that take a stand in politics, and serving in a voluntary capacity on local governing board. Scholars, however, have not reached a consensus on what constitute conventional and unconventional political participation. Conventional participation has been viewed as a relatively routine behaviour that uses the established institutions of representative government especially the campaigns for candidates and voting in elections. On the other hand, unconventional participation is a relatively uncommon behaviour that challenges or defies established institutions or dominant culture. Conventional political participation is associated with activities such as voting, letter writing to policy makers, contact with representatives, working on campaign, and campaign contribution; while Newton and Van Deth (2005), identified unconventional participation to include: demonstrations, boycott, sit-ins, use of violence, burning draft card, bombing government buildings etc.

Eme and Onuigbo (2015) state that political activities such as falsification of election result, political thuggery, hijack of ballot boxes, political assassination, burning of political party's building or candidate's campaign posters and other forms of electoral malpractices and violence are forms of unconventional political activities. Therefore, political participation as can be inferred from the above analysis, involves a wide spectrum of activities that takes different forms depending on the political culture of a given nation. Whether an activity is conventional or unconventional also depends on a nation's political culture, legal framework and socialization process. In the context of this work, political participation is seen from the conventional perspective such as registration as voters, membership of a political party, voting in elections, running for political positions, and participating in political debates.

### **Political Violence**

Violence or the threat of violence as a phenomenon is human behaviour which has been recognized in African countries as a dimension of local, national and international politics. Individuals and groups throughout history in one form or the other resorted to violence or its potential use as a tactic of political action. Direct violence refers to acts of deliberate violence resulting in a direct attack on a person's physical or psychological integrity. This category includes all forms of homicide (genocide, war crime, massacres, murders, terrorism) as well as all types of coercive or brutal actions involving physical or psychological suffering (kidnapping, torture, rape, maltreatment); such behaviour corresponds in all instances to illegal acts running counter to the most basic of all human rights, the right to life. Salami (2006) opined that indirect violence on the other hand is intended to cover harmful, sometimes even deadly situations or actions which, due to human intervention, do not necessarily involve a direct relationship between the victims and the institution.

Olagunji (2007) defined political violence as "the use or threat of physical force or group of individuals within a political system against another individual or individuals, and /or property, with the intent to cause

injury or death of persons and/or damage or destruction of property.” Political violence is endemic in most of the world’s political systems today. This is particularly true of the developing countries including societies where political violence has become a prominent feature of the political process, especially after independence. After political independence of Nigeria in 1960, it was hoped that the country will embrace and consolidate democracy devoid of political violence because of the peaceful, free and fair nature of the 1959 election, even though the results were disputed by some political parties. However, it is rather unfortunate that after independence, Nigeria has gone through a series of political violence and assassinations as the country witnessed a marked increase in the bitterness of party politics.

Political violence is among the reasons that contribute immensely to the low level of women’s participation in Nigerian politics (Abubakar and Ahmad, 2014). It has become the feature of democratization in Nigeria. Political violence seems to be institutionalized in Nigerian political process which makes the politics look dirty in the eyes of many Nigerians, and this often discourages people, especially women from participation (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010).

Political violence, thuggery and high level of intimidation is one of the factors limiting women from participating in the Nigerian politics as observed by Asma’u, (2012). The Nigerian political scene is bedevilled by violence. Political activities in Nigeria, since the beginning of the current democratic experiment in May 1999, have witnessed tremendous degrees of power struggle and political violence. Available statistics show that over 10,000 lives were lost to violent clashes between 1999 to June 2002. More so, the Nigerian Red Cross, was involved in the resettlement of over 250,000 individuals and 32,000 families as a result of various acts of political violence in the country in 2001 alone (Olukorede, 2002). According to Dudley (1973), the possession of political power leads directly to economic power. Those who hold positions in the power struggle determine the location and distribution of scarce resources. Therefore, politics in Nigeria is the struggle for more money and this means that to get into politics, there is always a price to pay. Going into politics, since it entails spending huge sums of money, one will have to be involved in some competition which may precipitate political violence. In view of this, political violence develops as a feature of struggle for power (Adeyemo, 2000).

In Nigeria, political violence has become highly disruptive to social life, thereby causing divisions in families and communities as well as causing antagonisms among and within social groups. Nigerians have witnessed several cases of political violence in the form of assassinations, bomb-blasts, intimidations, murders, and destruction of properties in time past and now it’s on the increase. Political violence in the Nigerian context can be regarded as a sort of response to frustrating circumstances (Punch Editorial February 17th, 2003). In Nigeria, the first notable act of political violence, after independence was the military coup of January 5, 1966, where a group of Nigerian young Army officers-Majors and Captains-seized power, assassinating the then Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa and Premiers Ahmadu Bello and Ladoke Akintola, of the Northern and Western Regions, respectively (Diamond, 1995). The first significant category of civilian coup occurred in Nigeria on 10th July, 2003, when the former Governor of Anambra State Chris Ngige, was abducted in a grand plot to unseat him.

Political activities in Nigeria, since the inception of the current democratic dispensation in 1999 till the present-day, have witnessed tremendous degrees of power struggle and political violence whereby the number of politically motivated murders is said to be equal to the number of people killed during the Nigerian civil war in 1967 to 1970 (Olawale, 2003). Over twenty prominent Nigerians were killed during this act of political violence and assassination called “Trial of Blood”. Politically motivated violent actions that involved murder or assassination and kidnappings between 1999 and 2011 are as follows:

- (1) September 9, 1999 - Sunday Ugwu was killed by gunmen who mistook him for his elder brother, Ugwu, a member of the Enugu State House of Assembly.
- (2) December 18, 2001 – Monday N. Fembari, a member of Rivers State House of Assembly, was assassinated.
- (5) August 13, 2002 – Janet Olapade, People’s Democratic Party (PDP) leader in Odigbo Local Government Area, Ondo State, was assassinated.
- (8) March 21, 2003 – Anthony Nwodo, Secretary of ANPP, Ezza North Local Government, Ebonyi State, was assassinated.
- (10) April 19, 2003 – Onyewuchi Iwuchukwu, ANPP stalwart in Ikeduru, Imo State, was murdered.
- (12) May 3, 2003 – Joyce Fatai, former Nassarawa State Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development, was murdered.
- (13) January 6, 2004 – Aminiasoari Dikibo, South-South National Vice Chairman of PDP, was assassinated.
- (16) February 5, 2005 – Sunday Atte, leader of the Legislative Council in Yagba East Local Government Area of Kogi State, was murdered.
- (17) July 30, 2006 - Funso Williams, a Governorship aspirant of PDP in Lagos State, was assassinated.
- (20) September 14, 2007 – Segun Oladimeji, fondly called Segelu, a PDP member of House of Representatives, representing Akinyele/Lagelu Federal Constituency, Oyo State, was assassinated.
- (21) March 4, 2010 Ademola Adegbite, Chairman of the PDP Atiba Local Government, Oyo State, was murdered.

(23) January 29, 2011- Modu Fannami Gubio, a Governorship candidate, and Goni Sheriff, were shot dead by unknown gunmen along with Ali Modu Sheriff and 5 others injured on their way home after performing the Jumat Service at the palace of the Shehu of Borno.

(24) In Ikot Ekpene and Uyo in Akwa Ibom State, over 800 vehicles belonging to the State Government were burnt (Akeem and Soyinka, 2011).

To Njoku (2012), political violence might occur at different stages of the electoral process, either before, during or after the election. He identifies some major causes of political violence in Nigeria as:

- i. Corruption
- ii. Unemployment
- iii. Lack of adequate security
- iv. Lack of democratic culture
- v. Failure of the justice system

### **Instances of Political Violence in Ebonyi State**

According to Onwe, Ibeogu and Nkwede (2017), the leadership in Ebonyi State under Chief Martin Nwanchor Elechi made efforts to ensure equity and fairness in the governance of the State. Based on his insistence that power must rotate among the senatorial zones of the state (Ebonyi North, Ebonyi Central, and Ebonyi South), the governor announced the adoption of Professor Onyebuchi Chukwu as the P.D.P flag bearer for the State on 3/10/2014 without the P.D.P Congress conducted, even though Ebonyi North and Central have had their share of governance. This act heightened tension in Ebonyi State, especially among those jostling for the governorship position under the platform of the P.D.P. Unfortunately, after the primaries were conducted, the then deputy governor, Engr. David Umahi emerged as the P.D.P flag bearer. This led to the polarization of the P.D.P as Governor Elechi was not in support of the candidature of Engr. Dave Umahi (Citizens Advocate, 2015). As a result of the division in the P.D.P, the loyalists of the Governor, which included some Commissioners, Special Advisers, Chairmen and members of Boards and Commissions, Local Governments Caretaker Committee Chairmen and Coordinators of the Development Areas (Development Centres) decided to throw their weight behind the flag bearer of the Labour Party (L.P) Architect Edward Nkwegu who was seen as a possible candidate and should be voted for to ensure that Engr. Dave Umahi of the P.D.P, does not emerge as the possible successor of Chief Martin Elechi, come May 29th 2015. This transcended to renewed incidence of violence leading to loss of lives and snatching of permanent voters card (P.V.C's) in places like Ikwo L.G.A, Izzi L.G.A etc; lives were lost in Ikwo and Afikpo South L.G.As during the Labour Party rally in January 2015, while cars and houses were burnt across Ebonyi State by P.D.P faithfuls owing to the rivalry between both parties.

Abah and Ibeogu, (2014) cited in Onwe, et. al. (2017) further state that P.D.P loyalists in the State House Assembly also accused Chief Martin Elechi of corruption, embezzlement of public fund, lack of due process in award of contracts as well as anti-party activities, especially as they were of the opinion that he was in support of Labour Party taking over power from him. A case in point was one where Chief Martin Elechi was threatened with impeachment by the Legislature. The Legislature (House of Assembly) led by Rt. Hon. Chukwuma Nwazunku, accused the governor and others close to him of economic and financial irregularities.

Others are the manner in which appointments were made by the governor without due processes and formal ratification by the House. The House therefore, alleged that in a bid to cow them from performing their constitutional duties, the Executive Arm masterminded the setting ablaze of a section of the House of Assembly (Accounts Department) on Tuesday 24th February 2015 at about 1.47 a.m. (Citizens Advocate, 2015). The paper reports that the House of Assembly after it's sitting and deliberation, resolved that Comrade Chinedu Ogah (P.D.P Youth Leader, Ebonyi State), Dr. Ben Igwenyi (Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice), Hon Celestine Nwali (Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Matters), Barrister Chibueze Agbo (Commissioner for Education), Dr. Ifeanyi Ikeh (Commissioner for Commerce and Industry, and Supervising Commissioner for Information) be arrested and charged for arson. It was credited to them by the House of Assembly, that prior to that inferno, they made a statement that "Ebonyi State House of Assembly will soon stop to exist".

In the same vein, the former Special Adviser to Governor Martin Elechi on Solid Mineral Development, Petroleum Product, Pricing and Distribution, Mr. Chidi Ejem who incidentally was the P.D.P House of Assembly candidate for Afikpo South West, State Constituency was arrested along with thirty-six others for killing a thirty-six (36yr) old man, Udu Emeagha of Amaigbo, Etiti Edda, Afikpo South Local Government Area of Ebonyi State during an attack on Labour Party Supporters in the area. Onwe, et. al. (2017) report that the coordinator of Ezeukwa Development Centre, Onicha Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, was also attacked by political thugs of the P.D.P, when they organized a rally in support of Labour Party. The rally which took place on Thursday, 5th March 2015; became a battle ground when thugs stormed Onuafor Ezeukwa, the venue of the event, armed with cutlasses, rods, bottles, woods and other dangerous weapons, and damaged over one thousand plastic chairs, after destroying five canopies and musical equipments meant for the occasion.

On Tuesday 17th March 2015, in Effium Community, in Ohaukwu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, one Elechi Omeligwe, was critically wounded, while many others sustained various degrees of injuries when political thugs numbering over two hundred (who were said to be on the suspected sponsorship of the ruling political party in the State) attacked members of Labour Party (LP). According to the report, the Labour Party Supporters were besieged at Ekpitom Village when they went to mobilize members of the Party's ward rallies. Narrating his ordeal, the victim, Elechi Omeligwe, reported that he had along with other members of the party travelled to the village in company of other members of his party for a ward rally when members of the P.D.P who were supposedly the supporters of Honourable Frank Onwe, a candidate of P.D.P for Ohaukwu North Constituency attacked them. He said the political thugs who mounted road blocs with heavy woods to prevent movement of their vehicles, also shot sporadically into the air to scare away the members of Labour Party.

Sequel to the 2019 elections in the state, The Guardian Newspaper (February 19, 2019) reported how two persons were killed, while others sustained various degrees of injuries following the political violence in the State. The incident which took place in Ngbo Agbaja ward, in Izzi Local Government Area was linked to suspected political thugs. Meanwhile, Governor David Umahi had in a media briefing during that period announced that two persons were arrested in the State for planting improvised explosive devices on Ugwogo Idembia bridge in Ezza South Local Government Area (<https://m.guardian.ng/news/two-killed-others-injured-in-ebonyi-political-crisis/>). Premium Times (February 19, 2019) also reported how at least thirty (30) houses were razed after suspected political thugs attacked several communities in Izzi local government area. The Police however confirmed that they only found one person injured, with about six houses razed and several motorcycles burnt, when they visited some of the communities. Premium Times reports that among the victims who lost their houses was Mr Donatus Nwofe, the Chairman of the Nigerian Union of Pensioners (NUP), Ebonyi Council. As expected, Premium Times reported how the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Parties (PDP) were trading blames over the incident (<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/ssouth-east/313759-victims-narrate-ordeal-after-ebonyi-political-violence.html>).

### **Current Status of Women in Politics in Nigeria**

Agbalajobi (2010) states that women's aspiration to participate in governance is premised on the following ground; that women in Nigeria represent half of the population and hence should be allowed a fair share in decision-making and the governance of the country. Secondly that all human beings are created equal and women possess the same rights as men to participate in governance and public life. The right to democratic governance is an entitlement conferred upon all citizens by the law and Constitution of Nigeria.

The 1999 Nigerian Constitution by virtue of Section 40 states the following: Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other persons, and in particular he may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his interests: Provided that the provisions of this section shall not derogate from the powers conferred by this Constitution on the Independent National Electoral Commission with respect to political parties to which that Commission does not accord recognition. Section 42(1) of the same Constitution states further that: A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination.

This further confirms that you can go to court to seek redress if as a woman your franchise is violated since the Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. Section 77 of the Constitution also states:

(1) Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, every Senatorial District or Federal Constituency established in accordance with the provisions of this Part of this Chapter shall return a member who shall be directly elected to the Senate or the House of Representatives in such manner as may be prescribed by an act of the National Assembly. (2) Every citizen of Nigeria, who has attained the age of eighteen years residing in Nigeria at the time of the registration of voters for purposes of election to a legislative house, shall be entitled to be registered as a voter for that election.

From the foregoing, it appears that there is nothing in the Constitution, which excludes the participation of women in politics in Nigeria. Yet when it comes to actual practice, there is extensive discrimination (Agbalajobi, 2010). Few and almost insignificant number of women were elected into various posts in the 1999, 2003 and 2007 general elections held in the country. Men dominated most public offices till date. Female gubernatorial candidates have emerged but none has ever won and the same goes for the Presidency. Legislative representation has witnessed the presence of women yet they remain under-represented when compared to their male counterparts (Agbalajobi, 2010).

Following two decades of military rule, statistics reveal that women only secured 3% representation in contested positions in 1999, 4% in 2003, while in 2007 they made do with only 6%. Few and almost insignificant number of women were elected into various posts in the past three general elections held in the country between 1999 and 2007. The result of the survey shows that no woman was elected as governor of any

state in the federation. Only few women ended up as members of Houses of Assembly across the country and as members of the upper house (Senate) and lower house (House of Representative) of the National Assembly. This shows a poor representation of women in the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections. In 2003 in States like Adamawa, Cross River, Ebonyi, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Nasarawa, Oyo, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara, no woman was elected as member of the State House of Assembly. In states where women were elected as members of House of Assembly, they were very few. According to the figures collated from the database of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), records shows that a total 7,160 candidates (men and women) contested in the April elections. Of this number, only 628 women participated. Out of the 25 candidates that participated for the office of the President, only 1 was a woman while 5 women contested for the office of the Vice President.

In the same vein, during the 2019 elections, female political representation was negligible relative to the population they constitute (The Guardian, 02 Oct, 2019). The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) reported that 2,970 women were on the electoral ballot, representing 11.36% of nominated candidates. As at the time of this report, 62 women had been elected, and given that there were contested cases, it would represent a decline from the 2015-19 periods, where women formed 5.66% of elected officials. This is a drop from the 8<sup>th</sup> Senate where women accounted for 6.42% of the total number of elected Senators. Figures from the House of Representatives also showed a steep decline from the 8<sup>th</sup> House. About 533 women contested representing 11.39% of nominees. However only 11(3.05%) were elected as at the time of this report (The Guardian, 02 Oct, 2019). At the State level, no woman was elected Governor, although women formed 3.07% of the total contestants. Of the 275 women representing 11.40% of candidates for deputy governorships, only four in Enugu, Kaduna, Ogun and Rivers had been elected. Thus, the number of female Deputy governors declined from six in the 2015 – 19 regimes, to four.

Njoku (2012) explains that the decline in the number of women in active politics can be associated with series of violence and intimidation associated with Nigerian political system because, political intimidation and violence have taken the centre stage in Nigerian politics, and many politicians in the country today rely on this strategy for attaining electoral victory. This scares many women off and presents the political environment as very hostile. Political brutality is employed to distract women's attention from participating in politics, sometimes they are beaten up, their family members are threatened, their marriages are set up for destruction, and these strategies scare women from the political race. In Benue state for instance, a woman prospective PDP candidate for the Senate received several threatening phone calls in October 2006 warning her that she should withdraw from politics. Several of those standing against her reportedly told her to stay out of the contest and stressed that if she continued to contest the nomination, the consequences would be more than she could handle. After two weeks, the police reportedly arrested someone who confessed that he had been hired to kill her.

In November 2006, another woman prospective candidate for the Federal House of Representatives received several threats, allegedly from opponents within her own party, the PDP. She lodged a complaint with the State Police Commissioner and was put under police protection. On 18<sup>th</sup> November 2006, when she attended a political meeting in her constituency, she was again threatened by her opponent and his supporters beat her and dragged her out of the venue.

Beside intimidation, participation in politics involves huge financial investment because it is assumed that electoral victory amounts to a poverty eradication initiative for the victor as victory guarantees access to the national treasury for looting. This therefore has made attaining in elective or appointive position in government highly competitive and nearly out of reach to women who do not have equal opportunities as men to accumulate wealth and increase their economic base (Olugbemi, 2004).

### **Level of Women Participation in Ebonyi State**

Between 2011 and 2019, a total of One thousand, eight hundred and forty six (1846) men served as ward councillors while only One hundred and twenty three (123) women occupied the position (Idike, 2013). The report indicates that from 2001 to 2009, the level of participation recorded by men was over 90% while women had between 2 – 4% to contend with, with a slight increase (17%) in 2010 and 2011. The situation was no different at the local government level as data indicates that between 2001 and 2003, no woman served as a chairperson. From 2004 to 2009 however, women continued to occupy only one out of the thirteen Local Governments in the State. So far, no woman has ever been elected as governor or deputy in the State. At the State House of Assembly, the slot available for women is yet to improve; meanwhile available records point out that presently, out of the 27 Ministries in the state, only four are headed by female Commissioners, namely: Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ministry of Women Affairs and Development, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development as well as Ministry of Budget and Planning. This scenario gives an indication that female participation in politics in Ebonyi state is not encouraging.

**Figure 1:** Illustration of the positions held by women from 2015-2019

	Available no. of seats	2015		2019	
		M	F	M	F
Governorship	1	1	0	1	0
State House of Assembly	24	22 (91.7%)	2(8.3%)	21 (87.5%)	3(12.5%)
LGA Chairperson	13	10 (76.9%)	3 (23.1%)	10 (76.9%)	3 (23.1%)

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### Study Area

Ebonyi State is a mainland South-Eastern State of Nigeria, inhabited and populated primarily by Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria. The Capital and largest city of Ebonyi State is Abakaliki. Afikpo is the second largest city. Ebonyi State is one of the six States in Nigeria created in 1996 by the Military Government of General Sani Abacha. The State was created from the old Abakaliki Division of Enugu State and old Afikpo Division of Abia State. The State is currently governed by Engr. David Umahi. Ebonyi is primarily an agricultural region. It is a leading producer of rice, yams, potatoes, maize, beans, and cassava. Rice and yams are predominantly cultivated in Edda. Ebonyi also has several solid mineral resources, but little large-scale commercial mining. Ebonyi is called "The Salt of the Nation" for its huge salt deposits at the Okposi and Uburu Salt Lakes. There are nine major first languages (variants of Igbo Language) spoken in Ebonyi State: Afikpo, Mgbo, Izzi, Ezza, Ikwo, Kukele, Legbo, Mbembe, and Oring. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebonyi\\_State](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebonyi_State)).

#### Data Collection methods

Data for the study were collected through the quantitative and qualitative methods; the quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire, while the qualitative method involved the use of journal publications and analysis of newspaper publications. The study was limited to only women within the age-frame of 30 to 60 years and above. Since the population is quite large, in order to achieve a closely matched sample size, a pilot survey was carried out to identify the sample population and 180 women were purposively selected from the three Senatorial districts; 60 respondents each from each Senatorial zone. Ebonyi South Senatorial District is made up of Afikpo North, Afikpo South, Ivo, Ohaozara and Onicha local governments; Ebonyi North comprises: Abakaliki, Ebonyi, Ohaukwu and Izzi local government areas while Ebonyi Central has Ikwo, Ezza North, Ezza South and Ishielu local government areas. The structured questionnaires were administered on the 180 respondents which involved the following social categories of people: teachers, artisans, public servants, owners of business enterprises, and farmers. After the administration of the questionnaires, the data generated were analyzed using simple percentage and weighted mean.

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1: Age distribution of respondents**

Items	Frequency	Percent
30 – 39	55	30.6%
40 – 49	42	23.3%
50 – 59	39	21.7%
60 and above	44	24.4%
<b>Total</b>	180	100

Table 1 shows that 55 of the respondents constituting 30.6% are within the age bracket of 30-39, while 42 respondents, representing 23.3 % are within the age limit of 40 - 49; 39 respondents within the age bracket of 50 - 59 constitute 21.7% even as 44 respondents representing 24.4% are 60 years and above. From the Table, it can be observed that majority of the respondents are within the age bracket of 30 to 39.

**Table 2: Occupation of respondents**

Items	Frequency	Percent
Traders	38	21.1%
Civil servants	40	22.2%
Artisans	43	23.9%
Farmers	37	20.6%
Others	22	12.2%



<b>Total</b>	180	100
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From Table 2, 21.1%(38) respondents were traders, 22.2%(40) respondents were civil servants, 23.9%(43) respondents were artisans, 20.6%(37) were farmers, while 12.2%(22) respondents had other occupation apart from those listed on questionnaire .

**Table 3: Academic qualification of respondents**

Items	Frequency	Percent
B.Sc/B.A/HND	42	23.3%
NCE	34	18.9%
O'LEVEL	51	28.3%
FSLC	36	20%
No Formal Education	17	9.4%
<b>Total</b>	180	99.9

Table 3 shows that 23.3% (42) respondents have B.Sc., 18.9% (34) respondents are NCE holders, 28.3% (51) have Ordinary 'Level, 20%(36) have First School Leaving Certificates while 9.4%(17) respondents had no formal education.

**Table 4 Respondents' responses on the prevalent nature of political violence and how it affects diverse facets of life**

Items	Frequency	Percent
Yes	121	67.2%
No	38	21.1%
Not sure	21	11.7%
<b>Total</b>	180	100

**Table 5: Respondents responses on the causes of political violence**

Items	Frequency	Percent
Corruption	23	12.8%
Unemployment	42	23.3%
Poverty	61	33.9%
Rigging	30	16.7%
Imposition of candidates	24	13.3%
<b>Total</b>	180	100

**Table 6: Respondents view on the level of women participation in politics**

Items	Frequency	Percent
Low	133	73.9%
High	35	19.4%
Don't know	12	6.7%
<b>Total</b>	180	100

**Table 7: The constraints to women political participation**

Items	Frequency	Percent
Ignorance	8	4.4%
Political violence	91	50.6%
Poverty	32	17.8%
Cultural stereotypes	25	13.9%
Gender inequality	24	13.3%
<b>Total</b>	180	100

**Table 8: Effects of political violence against women in Ebonyi state**

Items	Frequency	Percent
Low self worth	39	21.7%
Low participation of women in politics	132	73.3%
Others	9	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 9: Ways to curtail the prevalence of political violence in Ebonyi State which hinders the participation of women in politics**

Items	Frequency	Percent
Promotion of political education	22	12.2%
Poverty Alleviation Programmes	49	27.2%
Sensitization campaigns to mobilize women for political participation	55	30.6%
Value re-orientation programmes	43	23.9%
Reform in government policies	11	6.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100</b>

As shown in table 4, 67.2% (121) agree that political violence is largely responsible for the low participation of women in politics in Ebonyi state. However, 21.1% constituting 38 respondents differed on this opinion while 21(11.7%) respondents indicated that they weren't sure if political violence affected women's participation.

An analysis of these responses indicates that majority (67.2%) of the respondents agree that political violence is endemic and affects diverse facets of life namely political, social and economic. Their responses indicate that political violence is largely responsible for the low participation of women in politics in Ebonyi state. This further reflects women's view of violence in politics and the reason for the low participation/representation of women in politics as respondents believe that political violence in all its varying forms make politics an uninteresting endeavour for women as they find it uneasy to survive in a violent environment. This perception shows that politics in Nigeria is reputed to be dirty and this is made true by the sheer reason that often, politicians betray the electorate's trust by reneging on their electioneering-promises. It is also obvious that the methods employed by most male politicians in winning elections are unethical and illegal, and the violent aspect is dangerous, intimidating, and threatening. Thus, this finding is in line with Olag and Afolabis (2016) assertion that political violence is one of the factors that have resulted to the low level of Igbo Women political participation. Many political activities are characterized by violence, thuggery, high level of intimidation and killings. These discourage women from political participation. It is therefore of paramount importance to checkmate political violence before and after elections so that women who are interested can fully participate in elections.

Furthermore, Table 5 reveals that respondents agree that they are factors responsible for political violence which impacts negatively on women's participation in politics. These are corruption (12.8%), unemployment (23.3%), poverty (33.9%), rigging (16.7%) and imposition of candidates (13.3%). Poverty is however the highest causative factor (33.9%) confirming Jonathan's (2016) view that majority of youth in this nation (Nigeria) are jobless, with no means of livelihood, they are impoverished and mercenary politics becomes the way out. The politicians capitalize on this and recruit the youth who not only constitute the pillar of society, but also the most vulnerable to the self-inflicted poverty, as their thugs and touts to perpetrate violence. Data on Table 6 shows that 73.9% (133) see the level of women political participation in the state as low, as only 19.4% (35) respondents accepted that the level of women's participation in politics is high. Nonetheless, 6.7% (12) respondents said they do not know the level of women's participation in politics in the State. This is due to their indifference to political activities in the State. From Table 6 therefore, it can be concluded that the level of women political participation in Ebonyi State is still low. In like manner, we can deduce from Table 7, that the greater percentage of respondents 17.8% (32) agree that poverty is a major constraint to women's participation in politics. This is followed closely by cultural stereotypes (13.9%), gender inequality (13.3%) and lastly, ignorance (4.4%). Accordingly, this finding lends credence to Ojiakor cited in Enwo-Irem's (2019) observation that the discriminatory practices against women in the area of education, especially during colonial period and immediately after independence in Nigeria, served to ensure that only men were equipped with the kind of educational skills and qualifications requisite for high level managerial roles in public life. In the same vein, Olag and Afolabi (2016) point out that gender inequality is experienced by women and is manifested in almost all aspects of human endeavour in Nigeria. Cultural and religious beliefs tend to contribute largely to Igbo

women's gender discrimination and low status. Some of these beliefs have been practiced for so long that they are embedded in the societal perception almost as the norms such that the laws of the land and international instruments, which protect rights of women, are flagrantly infringed in the guise of these age-long cultural and religious beliefs.

In Table 8, responses indicate that a major effect of political violence against women in Ebonyi State is the low level of participation in political activities. As observed, 73.3% (132) respondents were in the affirmative, 21.7% (39) said low self worth was the effect of political violence on women while a lesser percentage (5%) pointed out other effects of political violence. This finding agrees with Egwemi and Ugbeda (2009) study that the implication of political violence on women has largely been psychological. This leaves women with a disposition, which is "we cannot do it". With such a disposition; it becomes difficult to expect effective women participation in the political process. This attitude of women is particularly engendered by violence against women, which has a damning psychological impact on them (Angya, 2005, Awake, 2008). Lastly in Table 9, responses suggest that promotion of political education (12.2%), poverty alleviation programmes (27.2%), sensitization campaigns as a way to mobilize women (30.6%), value re-orientation (23.9%) and a reform in some government policies (6.1%) are all ways in which political violence can be curtailed in Ebonyi State, thereby increasing the level of women participation in politics. Thus, an example of government policies needing reforms can be seen in some provisions of the 1999 Nigeria Constitution which according to UNCEDAW (2003) are discriminatory against women, especially in the areas of language (Section 131), on citizenship (Section 29), and in the construction of section 42 that prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex; this is because the section preserves the equal status for men and women only in relation to law but does not extend the protection to practice neither does the provision protect women from private actors.

## V. CONCLUSION

This paper examined political violence and women political participation in Nigeria. The paper found that political violence perpetuated by male politicians in a bid to remain relevant politically, serves to scare away women from actively participating in politics. The paper revealed that Nigerian politicians can go to any length to achieve their political desires which makes them engage in harassment and intimidation of their opponents in political contest including women. The result is the steady decline of women in political activities despite the fact that Nigeria has laws and programmes initiated to promote Nigerian women's involvement in political activities in Nigeria.

## VI. RECOMMENDATION

- i. There is need for sustained awareness and value re-orientation campaign on the importance of politics that is free from violence so that more women can confidently participate in politics and contribute their own quota to national development.
- ii. Programmes such as 'women for change initiative', women empowerment programmes and other related political education programmes should be constantly encouraged to promote Nigerian women involvement in political activities in Nigeria.
- iii. To ensure more women in politics, the Nigerian State and the political environment should ensure that proper legislation, with a robust sanction-system, is put in place to deal with the sponsors and perpetrators of political violence.
- iv. The need to build a Coalition of NGOs and Grassroots women associations that coordinates the support and advocacy for women aspirants is essential.
- v. Lastly, Nigerian women must continue the war for the domestication of the various international conventions and instruments that advocate gender equality. In this regard, it is important to state that in order to purge violence out of politics in Nigeria, and particularly in Ebonyi State, the men must support women to actualize their full potentials in politics by ridding themselves of the inherited stereotypes and prejudices against women. This would encourage more women to venture into the leadership circles.

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