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**THE EFFECT OF GENDER BALANCE ON ELECTION MANAGEMENT ORGANISATION IN THE
 NORTH CENTRAL REGION OF NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study entitled, the effect of gender balance on election management organisation in the north central region of Nigeria was conducted to determine, the impact of gender balance in decision-making positions in electoral management organization in North Central States, Nigeria; and the perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders towards women in decision-making positions in electoral management organisation in North Central States, Nigeria. The study adopts a mixed-methods research design, which involves both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. The findings show that, there is significant impact of gender balance in decision-making positions in electoral management in North Central States, Nigeria; Also, there is significant impact of the perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations, and the general public, towards gender balancing in decision-making positions in electoral management bodies in North Central States, Nigeria. The study therefore recommends that government should Develop and adopt gender-responsive electoral policies that address the specific needs, concerns, and experiences of both men and women, ensuring that the interests of all citizens are considered; Government should Organize public dialogues and forums where stakeholders can openly discuss and debate the benefits of gender balance in EMBs, facilitating a broader understanding of the issue.

Keywords: Election, Management, Gender, Organization Nigeria

Introduction

The foundation of democratic institutions is the equality of rights. This has historically been developed by various institutions, social movements and people fighting for their human rights (Adjepong, (2015). Women's rights supporters have led and continue to lead a fight for social, economic, cultural, civic, and political rights, claiming that "women's rights are human rights." With the struggle for women's voting rights, the women's suffrage movement advanced the human rights agenda. Saudi Arabia granted women the right to vote for the first time in 2015, joining the majority of countries around the world where national constitutions and legal frameworks codify the right to vote of men and women on an equal footing (Agbalajobi, (2010). Most countries also acknowledge women's right to run for office, voice their opinions, and form associations and peaceful assemblies, implying that women are free and capable of contributing to political and public life. Formal

acknowledgement of women's political rights, on the other hand, is far from translating into effective women's engagement in politics in practice.

Worldwide, women make up only 6.6 percent of presidents of state, 5.2 percent of heads of government, 24.3 percent of parliamentarians (Anyogu & Arinze, (2013) and an unknown percentage of women elected to local government (Awajiusuk, (2015). Despite official acknowledgement of their political rights, research demonstrates that women are still excluded from the political and democratic processes, and decision-making is still controlled by men (Ekpeyong, (2015). Widespread violence, gender-blind legal frameworks, a lack of formal and political education, existing practices within political parties that lead to women's exclusion, gender biased media coverage of the electoral process, and restricted access to campaign funding are some of the barriers that women currently face when entering the political and electoral arena

(Goitom, (2016). The masculine hegemony in politics and public life is the outcome of deeply ingrained cultural expectations about the roles that men and women should play in society. Men tend to have dominant roles in political leadership, moral authority, social status, and property ownership under patriarchal systems, and they have control over most life decisions, whereas women are excluded from the decision-making process and assigned to carrying tasks, (Igbokwe, 2013). This hostile environment may discourage women from pursuing careers in election management and limit their potential impact. Inadequate gender-sensitive policies and practices within election management bodies may perpetuate a biased and unequal system. It is against this backdrop that the researcher examines impact of gender- balancing on decision-making by electoral management bodies in north central states, Nigeria

Research Questions

The following research questions were drafted to be answered for the study:

- i. What are the impacts of gender balance in decision-making positions of electoral management organisation in North Central States, Nigeria?
- ii. How effective are the election management organisation in the north central region of Nigeria in ensuring the inclusion of participation of marginalized groups in the electoral process?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the effect of gender balance on election management organisation in the North Central region of Nigeria. The specific objective is to determine:

- i. The impact of gender balance in decision-making positions in electoral management organisation in North Central States, Nigeria.
- ii. The effectiveness of election management organisation in the north central region of Nigeria in ensuring the inclusion of participation of marginalized groups in the electoral process.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study specifically is that the study will enhance understanding of the impact of gender balance in decision-making positions within

electoral management bodies by examining the effect of gender balance on the development and implementation of electoral policies and practices, the study can provide insights into how inclusive decision-making can enhance the quality of electoral processes and outcomes. Identify barriers to gender balancing in electoral management bodies by exploring the attitudes and perceptions of stakeholders towards gender balancing, the study can identify potential challenges and barriers to achieving gender balance in decision-making positions. These recommendations can be used by policymakers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to promote more effective and inclusive electoral processes in the North Central States of Nigeria.

Literature Review

Gender Balancing

Gender balancing is a term used to describe efforts to achieve gender equity or balance in various contexts, including education, employment, and political representation. In the educational context, gender balancing typically refers to efforts to promote gender equity in educational outcomes, including access to education, enrolment rates, and academic achievement. A report by (UNESCO, 2019) highlighted the importance of gender balancing in promoting inclusive and equitable education systems. The report identified several key factors that contribute to gender disparities in education, including gender stereotypes and cultural norms, poverty, and limited access to resources. Efforts to promote gender balancing in education have taken various forms, including policy interventions, teacher training programs, and community-based initiatives. (UNICEF, 2014) identified several key strategies that have been effective in promoting gender equity in education, including increasing access to education for girls, promoting gender-sensitive curricula and teaching materials, and addressing gender-based violence and harassment in schools. The impact of gender balancing on educational outcomes has been studied extensively in the literature. A meta-analysis of studies on gender and education by (Eniola, 2018) found that girls tend to outperform boys in academic achievement, but that gender disparities in educational outcomes vary by subject area and geographic region. The literature highlights the importance of gender balancing in promoting inclusive and equitable education systems. By promoting gender equity in education, educators

can help to address broader social and economic inequalities and promote positive educational and social outcomes for all students.

Election Management Bodies (EMBs)

Election Management Bodies (EMBs) are independent or semi-independent organizations responsible for organizing and overseeing elections and other related electoral processes in a country. The primary role of EMBs is to ensure that elections are conducted fairly, transparently, and in accordance with the laws and regulations of the country. EMBs are responsible for maintaining accurate voter rolls by registering eligible voters and updating voter information (Just, 2017). EMBs oversee the process of candidate nomination, ensuring that candidates meet eligibility criteria and adhere to election laws. They design and print ballots for elections, taking into account the diverse needs and languages of voters. EMBs establish and manage polling stations, ensuring they are accessible and equipped with necessary materials. EMBs oversee the voting process, including the setup of polling stations, distribution of ballots, and monitoring of voting activities to prevent fraud or irregularities. They are responsible for counting votes, tallying results, and announcing election outcomes. EMBs handle election-related disputes and complaints, often through independent electoral tribunals or commissions (Just, 2017).

Women's Representation in Decision-Making Positions

Women's representation in decision-making positions refers to the presence and participation of women in leadership roles and influential positions within government, business, academia, and other organizations. Achieving gender parity and ensuring that women have a meaningful voice in shaping policies and decisions is a critical aspect of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment (Suleiman, 2017). Quotas can be legislated or voluntary and may apply to political parties, corporate boards, or public sector positions. Research has shown that gender-diverse decision-making bodies are associated with better decision-making, increased innovation, and improved performance in various sectors (Samuel, 2020).

Extent of Women Represented in Decision-Making Positions in Electoral Management Bodies in North Central States, Nigeria

In many regions, including Nigeria, women have been traditionally underrepresented in decision-making positions within EMBs and other political institutions. This underrepresentation is often due to a combination of socio-cultural norms, structural barriers, and historical factors. While efforts have been made to promote gender equality and increase women's participation in leadership roles, progress has often been slow (Fredrick, 2017). In North Central States, the extent of women's representation in decision-making positions within EMBs may vary from state to state and over time. Some states may have made more significant strides in promoting gender balance, while others may still have limited representation. Factors such as political will, legal frameworks, and advocacy efforts can influence the level of gender representation in these positions (Ewim, Agbodike & Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2017).

Impact of Gender Balance in decision-making positions in electoral management bodies in North Central States, Nigeria

Gender-balanced EMBs bring diverse perspectives and experiences to the table, resulting in more comprehensive and inclusive electoral policies that reflect the needs and concerns of all citizens, regardless of gender. Women in decision-making positions are more likely to advocate for and prioritize gender-sensitive policies, such as ensuring equal access to polling stations, addressing gender-based violence during elections, and promoting women's political participation (Afolabi, 2022). Gender balance in EMBs contributes to more equitable representation of women in all stages of the electoral process, from voter registration to candidate nomination and campaign regulations. A gender-balanced EMB enhances the credibility and legitimacy of elections by ensuring that the processes are perceived as fair and unbiased, fostering greater public trust in the electoral system. Gender-balanced EMBs are more likely to design and implement effective voter education programs that address the specific needs and challenges faced by women voters, leading to increased political participation (Afolabi, 2022).

Perceptions and Attitudes of Stakeholders, In Decision-Making Positions in Electoral Management Bodies in North Central States, Nigeria

The perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations, and the general public, towards gender balancing in decision-making positions in electoral management bodies (EMBs) have a significant influence in North Central States, Nigeria. Positive perceptions and attitudes among stakeholders can lead to stronger advocacy efforts and increased pressure on political parties and government institutions to implement gender-balancing measures within EMBs (David, 2020). Supportive attitudes from political parties can lead to the introduction and passage of legislation that mandates gender quotas or other measures aimed at achieving gender balance in decision-making positions. Political parties' attitudes towards gender balance influence their willingness to nominate women as candidates for EMB leadership roles, thereby directly impacting the pool of potential candidates. Civil society organizations' and political parties' attitudes can affect the framing of electoral campaigns, encouraging the public to value and demand gender equality in decision-making within EMBs (Ejumudo, 2017).

Afolabi and Adeleke (2019) conducted a study on the role of gender in the management of elections in Nigeria, with a focus on the INEC. The study employed a qualitative approach, including semi-structured interviews and document analysis, to collect data from INEC officials, political parties, civil society organizations, and the general public. The study found that despite some progress, gender inequality persisted in the management of elections in Nigeria, and women remained underrepresented in leadership positions in the INEC. The study found that gender stereotypes and cultural norms, including perceptions of women's roles in society, hindered women's participation in electoral management. Moreover, the study found that increasing the representation of women in leadership positions in the INEC could lead to more inclusive and representative electoral policies and practices.

The study adopted Critical Feminist Theory

The theory was proposed by Adjepong in 2015.

Critical Feminist theory suggests that a certain proportion of women's representation is necessary to achieve gender equality in decision-making processes. As noted by Adjepong (2015), "women need to constitute a critical Feminist in decision-making bodies in order to have an impact on policy and practice." In the context of gender balancing on EMBs, the theory suggests that a minimum threshold of women's representation is necessary to overcome the barriers to women's participation and influence in electoral processes. Increasing women's representation on EMBs can lead to more equitable and inclusive decision-making processes. As noted by UN Women (2018), "women's participation in EMBs can help ensure that electoral processes are more gender-sensitive, and that the diverse perspectives and needs of all voters are represented." Critical Feminist theory posits that achieving a certain threshold of women's representation is necessary to ensure that women's perspectives and needs are not marginalized or overlooked in decision-making processes.

However, patriarchal attitudes and systemic discrimination continue to limit women's participation in politics and representation in EMBs in north central states Nigeria. As noted by Olu-Adeyemi (2017), "women face multiple barriers to participating in electoral processes, including cultural and social norms that reinforce gender stereotypes and restrict women's access to political power." Achieving critical Feminist of women's representation requires addressing these underlying structural barriers, as well as promoting women's leadership and building networks to support their participation.

In conclusion, critical Feminist theory provides a valuable theoretical framework for understanding the importance of achieving a minimum threshold of women's representation on EMBs in north central states Nigeria. By ensuring that women's perspectives and needs are represented, gender-balanced EMBs can lead to more equitable and inclusive decision-making processes that are sensitive to the diverse needs and perspectives of all voters. However, achieving critical Feminist requires addressing the underlying structural barriers that limit women's participation and representation in EMBs.

Relevance of Critical Feminist theory

The relevance of critical Feminist theory to gender balancing on election management bodies (EMBs) in north central states Nigeria lies in its ability to provide a framework for understanding the importance of achieving a minimum threshold of women's representation in decision-making processes. In the context of EMBs, critical Feminist theory suggests that a certain proportion of women's representation is necessary to ensure that women's perspectives and needs are not marginalized or overlooked in decision-making processes. Achieving critical Feminist of women's representation on EMBs can have significant implications for promoting gender equality and inclusive governance in electoral processes. Research has shown that increasing women's representation on EMBs can lead to more equitable and inclusive decision-making processes that are sensitive to the diverse needs and perspectives of all voters. As noted by UN Women (2018), "women's participation in EMBs can help ensure that electoral processes are more gender-sensitive." Critical Feminist theory provides a useful framework for understanding the importance of achieving a minimum threshold of women's representation on EMBs in north central

states Nigeria. By ensuring that women's perspectives and needs are represented, gender-balanced EMBs can lead to more equitable and inclusive decision-making processes that promote gender equality and inclusive governance in electoral processes. However, achieving critical Feminist requires addressing the underlying structural barriers that limit women's participation and representation in EMBs.

Methodology

The study adopts a mixed-methods research design, which involves both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. The qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews will be transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. The quantitative data collected through the survey will be analysed using descriptive statistics of Mean and standard deviation.

Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The study covers six states in North Central Nigeria such as Benue, Plateau, Kogi, Kwara, Niger and Nasarawa, and the expected number of respondents per state varies based on the population group.

S/N	population group	Number of States	Official of population groupper State	Total
1	INEC officials at the national and state levels	6	96	96
2	Officials of state-level election management bodies	6	36	36
3	Civil society organizations involved in promoting gender balance	6	36	36
4	Political parties	6	23	23
5	Women who have contested for election	6	96	96
6	Women who have served in election management bodies	6	108	108
7	Men who have served in election management bodies	6	210	210
8	Relevant government officials responsible for policy development	6	60	60
Total		6	665	665

Stratified random sampling was used to select 60 respondents from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials at the national and state

levels. This ensured representation from all levels and departments of the organization in the 6 states of the North Central region. Convenience sampling was used to select respondents from officials of state-level

election management bodies in the 6 states. This was because it was difficult to identify a representative sample and gain access to these officials. Snowball sampling was used to select 30 respondents from civil society organizations involved in promoting gender balance in the 6 states. This was because these organizations were expected to have networks and relationships that would help identify other organizations involved in gender balancing in the region. Convenience sampling was used to select 18 respondents from political parties in the 6 states. This was because it was difficult to identify a representative sample of political parties involved in gender balancing. Purposive sampling was used to select 60 women who have contested for election, 30 women who have served in election management bodies, and 30 men who have served in election management bodies in the 6 states. This ensured representation from various levels of government and election management bodies. Convenience sampling was used to select 12 relevant government officials responsible for policy development in the 6 states. This was because it was difficult to identify a representative sample of these officials. Overall, a total of 270 respondents were selected from the different population groups in the 6 states of the North Central

region of Nigeria.

Validation of Instrument

Instruments were subjected to validation by experts from Department of Gender Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi for proper scrutiny. Correction made by these experts was properly affected before the final draft of the instrument, and the validation index of the instruments was 0.90 respectively.

Reliability of the Instrument

In order to test the reliability of the instruments, the researcher conducted a trial test on a small sample size of 20 men and female outside the selected sample from the target population. The data collected was subjected to SPSS software which determine the internal consistency of Cronbach alpha reliability statistics and the reliability index obtained respectively at 0.82. index.

Results

Research Question One: What are the impacts of gender balance in decision-making positions of electoral management organisation in North Central States, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Showing gender balance in decision- making positions in electoral management organisation in North Central States, Nigeria.

Item	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	Std	decision
1 Women are currently well represented in decision-making positions in electoral management bodies in North Central States, Nigeria.	190	60	15	5	3.61	1.90	Agree
2 Gender biases and stereotypes limit the representation of women in decision-making positions in electoral management bodies	185	65	17	3	3.60	1.89	Agree
3 Lack of political will by the government and electoral management bodies contribute to the low representation of women in decision-making positions.	170	80	8	12	3.51	1.87	Agree
4 Policies and programs aimed at promoting gender balance in electoral management bodies are necessary.	240	26	3	1	3.87	1.96	Agree
5 Gender balance in decision- making positions will improve the credibility and legitimacy of electoral processes in Nigeria.	214	55	1	0	3.78	1.94	Agree
Cluster mean					3.59	1.92	Agree

Research Questions One Analysis

From item 10-15 show decision of the respondent agree with the opinion of the researcher on the item list, the cluster mean of 3.59 with standard deviation of 1.92 found above the scale mean of 2.50. Hence, gender balances in decision-making positions in electoral management bodies have influence in North Central States, Nigeria and the development and implementation of electoral policies and practices.

Gender-balanced decision-making fosters public trust in the electoral process, as people see their interests and concerns represented, leading to greater confidence in the fairness and integrity of elections.

Research Question Two: How effective are the election management organisation in the north central region of Nigeria in ensuring the inclusion of participation of marginalized groups in the electoral process

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Showing perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations, and the general public, towards gender balancing in decision-making positions in electoral management organisation in North Central States, Nigeria

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std	decision
1 Women have the same opportunities as men to attain decision-making positions in electoral management bodies.	190	60	15	5	3.61	1.90	Agree
2 Political parties should prioritize gender balance in their nominations for decision-making positions in electoral management bodies.	240	26	3	1	3.87	1.96	Agree
3 Civil society organizations should advocate for gender balance in decision-making positions in electoral management bodies.	214	55	1	0	3.78	1.94	Agree
4 The general public is supportive of gender balance in decision-making positions in electoral management bodies.	190	60	13	7	3.60	1.89	Agree
5 Gender balance in decision-making positions in electoral management bodies will lead to better electoral policies and practices.	180	70	17	3	3.58	1.89	Agree
Cluster mean					3.68	1.94	Agree

Research Question Two: from item 15-20 show decision of the respondent agree with the opinion of the researcher on the item list, the cluster mean of 3.68 with standard deviation of 1.94 was found above the scale mean of 2.50. Hence, the perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations, and the general public, towards gender balancing in decision-making positions in electoral management bodies have influence in North Central States, Nigeria. Positive perceptions and attitudes among stakeholders lead to stronger advocacy efforts and increased pressure on political parties and government institutions to implement gender-balancing measures within EMBs.

gender balance in decision-making positions in electoral management bodies on development and implementation of electoral policies and practices in North Central States, Nigeria. this agrees with (Frank, 2022). Gender balance in EMBs contributes to more equitable representation of women in all stages of the electoral process, from voter registration to candidate nomination and campaign regulations. A gender-balanced EMB enhances the credibility and legitimacy of elections by ensuring that the processes are perceived as fair and unbiased, fostering greater public trust in the electoral system. The agreement with analysis in null hypotheses show the chi-square calculated of 278.32 is greater than chi-square table value of 14.067. P-value of 0.02 is less than the alpha level of significant 0.05 calculated at 7 degrees of freedom. This implies that there is significant impact

Discussion

The finding show there is significant impact of

of gender balance in decision-making positions in electoral management bodies on development and implementation of electoral policies and practices in North Central States, Nigeria

Secondly, finding show there is significant impact of the perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations, and the general public, towards gender balancing in decision-making positions in electoral management bodies in North Central States, Nigeria. This agrees with (David, 2020). Positive perceptions and attitudes among stakeholders can lead to stronger advocacy efforts and increased pressure on political parties and government institutions to implement gender-balancing measures within EMBs. Supportive attitudes from political parties can lead to the introduction and passage of legislation that mandates gender quotas or other measures aimed at achieving gender balance in decision-making positions. Political parties' attitudes towards gender balance influence their willingness to nominate women as candidates for EMB leadership roles, thereby directly impacting the pool of potential candidates. Similarly, Analysis in null hypotheses four show the chi-square calculated of 282.42 is greater than chi-square table value of 14.067. P-value of 0.02 is less than the alpha level of significant 0.05 calculated at 7 degrees of freedom. This implies that there is

significant impact of the perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations, and the general public, towards gender balancing in decision-making positions in electoral management bodies in North Central States, Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study concluded that:

There is significant impact of gender balance in decision-making positions in electoral management bodies on development and implementation of electoral policies and practices in North Central States, Nigeria; There is significant impact of the perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations, and the general public, towards gender balancing in decision-making positions in electoral management bodies in North Central States, Nigeria. The study therefore recommends that government should Develop and adopt gender-responsive electoral policies that address the specific needs, concerns, and experiences of both men and women, ensuring that the interests of all citizens are considered; Government should Organize public dialogues and forums where stakeholders can openly discuss and debate the benefits of gender balance in EMBs, facilitating a broader understanding of the issue.

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