Democracy and Challenges of Participation and Exclusion in Nigeria

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Abstract

Democracy is cherished because of the opportunities it offers people to contribute to issues affecting their lives. This reasoning accounts for the celebration when this form of government was restored in Nigeria in 1999 after protracted military dictatorships. In 2019 there were further jubilations over 20 unbroken years of democracy, the first since independence in 1960; issues of inclusion and exclusion were not mentioned. Yet, there are widespread exclusion of ethnic minorities and women through which their participation in running for office is circumscribed by circumstances of birth. Experiences in Plateau and Benue States are used as illustrations. It is here contended that until more deliberate efforts are made to include everyone, Nigeria’s brand of democracy will continue to exclude ethnic minorities and women. The dominant mantra of ‘majority carries the vote’ only aggravates the problem, a deliberate policy to resolve exclusion is necessary. Rwanda has led the way in gender inclusion, just as the USA had also shown that through policy reforms such as universal suffrage and affirmative action, African Americans and other minorities can become part of the mainstream, even producing a President and recently, 2021, the Vice President.

Key words: Democracy, Inclusion and Exclusion in Nigeria

Introduction

Democracy is a cherished system of government which enables the people—irrespective of ethnic origins, socioeconomic status or gender—to participate in the affairs of society mostly because it potentially enables their voices and aspirations to be captured in policy formulation and implementation. Through representatives at the local council, state and federal levels, their voices are, at least notionally, can be projected and protected. Whether this in fact materialises need not detain us here; the point is made that democracy enables the people to participate in decision making in the way the government is run.

Nigeria returned to democratic (some say, civilian) rule in 1999 after bouts of military dictatorships in the process through which over half of almost 60 years of independence were under military rule. For most of 2019 there were celebrations of 20 years of continuous democratic rule, the first since independence in 1960. Mute in the jubilations are the nature of participation and exclusion in the democratic process. All these twenty years, for example, have not recorded any transition from a set of elected representatives to the other at the local government level. The exception is Akwa Ibom which blazed the trail in the handover from one set of elected officers to the other in December.
Elections at this level do not (perhaps, deliberately) follow the same timetable as those of the state and national. Because the local council elections come after the states’, governors frequently dissolve existing local council elected structures and replace these with handpicked caretaker committees. The opposition is largely excluded from the caretaker arrangements; this process circumscribes the nature of participation at this level, as popular participation is reduced to governors’ choice. The obvious purpose is to give the governors some head start in future elections.

There is also the knotty issue of ethnicity, and how membership of majority and minority groups facilitates or impedes political participation. During the First Republic, the majority ethnic groups ran the country. The creation of states by military governments, beginning in 1967, was part of some attempt to give smaller nationalities more voice as well as more sense of self determination. But as is well documented, the creation of states only reconfigures the situation into national and state majority ethnic groups with the latter lording it over minority groups at the state level (Elaigwu, 2018; Toure-Kaza, 2003; Agbese, 2003). Illustrations here include the Igala who are a national minority but an ethnic majority in Kogi State; the same is true of the Tiv, who are now a majority in Benue State (Tyoden, 2001).

Nigeria’s democracy also has few representatives of women at all levels. Indeed, the composition has been uneven and undulating, ranging between 7% and 12% of elective offices at the National Assembly as illustrated in tables 3 and 4 below. This gender imbalance relates to all levels of representation (Ibrahim & Salihu, 2004; Alubo, 2005; Ogbuagu, 2002; Agina-Ude, 2003). In addition, there are issues about the nature of participation of various components of the electorate in terms of geo-political, and ethnic composition. A continuing clamour in Nigeria is a sense of belonging (Abah & Okwori, 2002; 2005) as manifest in the nature of participation and representation. It is always contentious which of Nigeria’s six geo-political regions would produce the President; the same is true for key officials of the National Assembly such as Senate President and Speaker of the House of Representatives. As Toure-Kaza has argued, this is a vexed issue in the politics of postcolonial Africa, no least, because issues revolve around “the control of State and its centrality to access, control and distribution of resources and provision of services” (2003:20).

There is also the crucial issue of participation and sense of belonging in one Nigeria such that some have argued that until an Igbo man becomes President, there is subtle continuation of civil war against the Ndi-Igbo—the majority ethnic group in the Eastern Region which attempted to secede in the 1967-1970 civil war (Ekweremadu, 2018). Part of this argument includes the fact that the South East is the only geo-political region with five states, all others have six except the North West which has seven. The implications are multiple such as statutory monthly allocation of funds which goes directly to states; appointment of ministers based on at least one per state, as well as other key appointments such as permanent secretaries. There are also implications for a sense of belonging which determines the “amount” of participation.
This essay focuses on participation (inclusion) and exclusion in Nigeria’s democracy with particular attention to ethnicity and gender. It is based on desk review of the experiences of democracy especially since 1999. Participation is used here to refer to extent of being part of processes in governance at all levels, in decision making, and whether interests of various constituent units are canvassed and acted upon. Where this does not obtain, fully or at least in part, there is exclusion through which people are marginalized and alienated from processes they wish to be part of. Ethnicity and political participation dovetail into majority/minority nationalities, at both the local and national levels. There is also a gender dimension; since 1999, the number of women in policy making positions has declined. There is currently no female governor in any of the 36 states. This challenge of who holds what office from the geo-political regions or the senatorial zones in the states is often termed “zoning”, or simply the extent to which elections and appointments are dominated by the majority ethnic groups (Alubo, 2005; 2008) at the three tiers of government in Nigeria, as well as extent of exclusion of minorities.

The first part of the essay is a theoretical discourse on politics as part of the contestations for control over public space. It is here argued that contestations for political participation take place in the public space, and the public space is itself an object of contention between various publics. The determining factor is the amount of power and influence over what is done, how and in whose interests. The second turns to ethnic and gender participation in key positions and how these indicate inclusion and exclusion. It is concluded that thus far, democratic rule seems to have consolidated existing ethnic and gender dominations with all that this implies for exclusion and alienation. Broad based agitations by civil society, and constitutional inclusion of rotation and gender representation are required to change the situation and thereby foster more inclusion.

**Public Space and Politics: A Theoretical Position**

The nature and extent of participation in any form of government is essentially about the public space and the various countervailing contestations for its control. It is trite to state that beyond the “national interest” which is often touted as a more acceptable presentation for ethnic and religious interests, there are others which seek to bring on board the groups often relegated to the background for reasons of ethnicity, religion, gender and regional calculations. It is here argued that Nigeria’s public space is a contested terrain, access to, and participation in, which reflects all the known divides in society such as gender, class, religion and ethnicity. Some of these contestations have led to explosions of violence pitting indigenes against settlers, one ethnic group against the other(s), as well as Christians against Muslims (Alubo, 2008; Egwu, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2006). The public space in Nigeria takes many forms including geo-political space of the state, religious and secular spaces; as well as work related spaces. These spaces are in addition to more global and international spaces such as cyber space and international community fora such as the Economic Community for West Africa (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and United Nations Organizations and its Agencies.
Nigeria’s state and the government are reckoned as occupying some geo-political space which is internationally recognized by other countries and the international community. Nigeria’s physical space of almost one million square kilometres has three tiers of government. The federal government oversees all of the vast territory and has exclusive rights over a variety of issues. The second tier is the state; all 36 and Federal Capital Territory, which have designated geo-political spaces within the bigger Nigerian geo-territorial space. The Local Council Areas are the third tier of government and are located within the states as well as the Federal Capital Territory. These state-territorial spaces are clearly demarcated and recognized both by those within and outside each tier of government. But the issue is not the spaces per se but access to resources and participation in decision-making. There are therefore questions about whose public space(s); who controls the space(s) and what is the nature of participation of the various publics?

Religion is an important social institution in Nigeria and part of this importance is the spaces religious organizations occupy. In addition to the more traditional places of worship such as churches and mosques (traditional religion is mostly in the background), there are now huge open-air spaces where the faithful assembly for special festivities and prayers. Such open spaces are mostly located along highways and when the faithful (some times in the hundreds of thousands) gather, they frequently impede vehicular traffic. Whether in the more traditional enclosures or in open spaces, religious spaces are regulated by moral codes, including dress codes. There are several attempts to expand religious spaces to cover entire states such as the imposition of shari’a (Ostien et al., 2005; Egwu 2008; Gofwen, 2003; Kuna, 2005) and moral codes (such as the prohibition of the sale and consumption of alcohol). Such codes are binding on all believers and non-believers alike.

There are also secular spaces such as public parks, amusement parks and gardens. Many of these parks and gardens are owned by city councils, local councils and state governments. However, while “owned” by the public, there are also enormous private interests. In and around Abuja, for example, some of the public parks are maintained by private construction companies supposedly as part of corporate responsibility. There are other private sector interests in the use of these spaces for sale and consumption of alcohol, roast fish and chicken kebabs. In effect, these spaces have been transformed into private cum public fora for commercial activities rather than the more sedate spaces they were originally conceived to be.

The more symbolic spaces are also recognized in Nigeria. There was, for instance, a protracted struggle during the long years of military rule for the opening up and the enthroning of democratic space. Along the same line, there was some clamour in the first years of the 1999 return to civil rule for more opening of the democratic space to permit the registration of more political parties (Elaigwu, 2018; Ibrahim, 2006). There are also the less visible cyberspace and international fora, all of which constitute the spectrum of public spaces in Nigeria.
Irrespective of types, public spaces in Nigeria are a contested terrain in which many publics meet, interact and engage in various forms of contestations. These publics which are defined by various membership criteria such as ethnicity, religion, class and gender try to build solidarity for purposes of greater access, control and participation. It is here argued that public spaces are not really public in the sense of common property over which members of the public have equal access and participation. To the contrary, public spaces are veritable battle grounds where various publics, based on equally diverse interests, engage in countervailing struggles. Public spaces are fora where citizens encounter one another, negotiate control and sometimes engage in violent struggles. These struggles are essentially over ownership and access, control, and participation. It is important to examine these issues in some detail.

Ownership of, and Access to Public Spaces

Sometimes, ownership of many public spaces seems obvious such as religiously owned spaces and publicly owned ones. Ownership of other spaces (such as cyberspace, and international organizations) are less obvious, if also seemingly collective. These last groups of spaces are often not as contentious as the more public and state geo-political spaces. States and local council, as indeed the Federal Government, are part of the commonwealth and notionally, collectively owned by all members of the public. This sense is however deceptive as there are spirited attempts by some publics at each stage to take possession of and push the common state spaces in particular directions. In Nigeria’s history, such struggles include the forcible overthrow of civilian government (which governed by the constitution) by the military (which ruled by decrees); and the imposition of structural adjustment programmes and neo-liberal policies by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1986 (Egwu, 1998) which ended the era of state-provided welfare (Erinosho, 2008; Egwu, 1998). Other issues include attempts to enforce religious codes such as the 2008 debate about dress code; the attempts by the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory in the second quarter of 2008 to prohibit the sale and consumption of alcohol in Abuja public gardens and parks; and much earlier the 1986 surreptitious registration of Nigeria as a member of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Aside these general concerns, struggles for the control of state spaces are fierce because these are the spaces where citizenship rights, entitlements and opportunities are contested, won or lost.

Simultaneously with the struggle for ownership is the struggle for access to public spaces. Those who attempt to claim ownership also try to define criteria for participation and spell out who is included or excluded. This issue of inclusion and exclusion is a recurring decimal and regularly expressed in popular parlance as the national question and sense of belonging. There are always members of the Nigerian public who decry marginalization and exclusion; they regularly compare themselves with other group(s) they regard as better placed (Alubo, 2011; Abah & Okwori, 2002; Akinyemi, 2005; Elaigwu, 2005). The regular staple is the absence of federal presence by which is meant little or no institutions and very few people represented in the central government; in effect,
little participation. Increasingly, such allegations are made on behalf of particular geo-political
spaces. There are regular clamours about neglect of particular geo-political zone(s) and prescriptions
of what remedial steps are necessary. It is in this sense that we agree with Rinaldo that the public
spaces are “arenas of negotiation among a variety of publics” (Rinaldo, 2008:1782).

In Nigeria, these publics include ethnic and religious groups and more recently geo-regional groupings.
This is illustrated by the armed struggles in the oil producing Niger Delta region which has brought
the various ethnic groups in the region under one umbrella of oil and control of its process (Ibeanu,
2003). Control of state public spaces is also important because Nigeria’s federation remains over-
centralized especially in the management of revenues which go first to a joint federation account
and are later distributed to the states (Elaigwu, 2001). The formula for such revenue sharing has
remained an issue with different regions (spaces) agitating for larger shares. Different positions are
canvassed, and there are also contests over priorities and what share of resources should go to
what development priorities.

**Participation and Exclusion in Public Spaces**

Another dimension of Nigeria’s public space is the nature of participation. In most of these spaces,
criteria for participation are clearly spelt out and generally non-contentious. There is some unanimity
about what roles Christians and Muslims play in their places of worship and what roles non-
members of the denominations have with regards to the two religions. The same is true about public
parks and gardens which are regulated by local councils and in the case of tourist parks, by the
state Tourism Board. This is not the case in state spaces in which the three tiers of government
exist. Perennially, there are countervailing struggles for more access to and better participation in
the state spaces. Often, some publics, such as religious or ethnic groups perceive themselves as
marginalized, largely excluded and play only second fiddle. Research on citizenship and participation
in governance has shown that allegations about marginalization are pervasive just as are allegations
about government’s bias (Abah & Okwori, 2002). It was even alleged that governments, at all
three tiers have their own ethnic groups—usually the ethnic groups of the core people in leadership.
Religious affiliation is also read into the quality of participation in government. Correctly perceived
or otherwise, there are allegations of favouritism towards Christians or Muslims. The current
government of Muhammad Buhari is alleged to be pro Muslim, and pro-Hausa/Fulani (Kukah,
2021; Akinlotan, 2020). Gender is also an important criterion for participation and exclusion.

The central issue about participation and exclusion in democracy relates to the nature of public
space in question. At whatever level there are majority and minority ethnic groups which struggle to
have more voice (Agbese, 2003). Often, the majority wins the day but in some other circumstances,
it is about more inclusion and collective approach rather than ‘majority carries the vote’. In the
former logic positions are rotated on the basis of clans and lineages such that all have some equal
opportunities to participate (Madunagu, 2002). In the latter, the majority insist on having their way
but allow the minority only a say. The one makes for more integration and participation while the
other breeds alienation and exclusion. Politics in Nigeria, especially in a democracy, is the test of
balancing the agitations of majority and minority groups.

**Contest for the Presidency and Geo-ethnic Politics**

All across Nigeria there is spirited contest for the control of public space through political participation.
Such participation is mostly about who holds what office(s) and how the office is linked to power
and control. Thus, the big prize is the President of Nigeria (and Commander-in-Chief who also
controls vast political and economic opportunities) and how various geo-political zones clamour for
it. At the return of democracy in 1999, when the north which had dominated the office in the military
era was replaced by Olusegun Obasanjo from by the South West, it was christened *power-shift*
and celebrated especially in his home geo-political region. Olusegun Obasanjo was president for
two terms (1999-2007); there after, there was clamour again for presidency between the various
zones (Ngwodo, 2018; Elaigwu, 2018). The North wanted power back; the South East also wanted
to produce the President and so did the South-South minorities, the oil producing region. In the end
Umaru Yar’Adua, former Governor of Katsina State in the North West, who at the time was
frequently abroad for medical care, ran under the ruling People’s Democratic Party and won.

He continued the string of absences to seek medical care abroad and eventually died in office in
2010. Whether key politicians foresaw that possibility before making Goodluck Jonathan the running
mate to Yar’Adua (should the President die, the vice would automatically take over, power shift to
the South-South would have been achieved by default) is conjectural. His health condition was
“shrouded in secrecy....it was only in 2009 when Yar’Adua left for long periods to Germany and
Saudi Arabia for treatment, that Nigerians became aware of the serious nature of his illnesses”
(Okonjo-Iweala,2018:18). In one of the series of medical trips, President Yar’Adua was absent for
over 70 days but without transmitting power to the Vice President as spelt out in the constitution.
This gave the opportunity to the Senate to invoke “doctrine of necessity” to make Jonathan the
Acting President. President Yar’Adua died on May 5, 2010 and the Vice President continued as
Acting President for the rest of the tenure (Elaigwu,2018:332-333). The situation simultaneously
fulfilled the constitutional provision as well as the demand from his home base, the South-South
minorities, to have the President from the Niger Delta.

However, it was first about completing the tenure for which he was elected Vice President. The real
struggle was in 2011 when new elections were due. However, it was generally smooth for Goodluck
Jonathan to win. As one analyst explained,

*As a native of the Niger-Delta—a region with historically fractious relationship with the Igbo
ethnic arithmetic suggest that Jonathan would struggle in the East. He did not. He won*
so handily[sic] in the Igbo States and despite claims of electoral irregularities, his victory was unimpeachable (Ngwodo, 2018:170)

His period as President was generally lacklustre, others even say “clueless” and recorded several allegations of impropriety such as State Governors’ claim that the federal government withdrew N2.9 trillion from the Excess Crude Account; the Central Bank Governor’s allegation of missing of $20 billion from the oil corporation (Elaigwu, 2018:243, 341). Many of the allegations were however denied (Okonjo-Iweala, 2018), although in the 2019/2020 period the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Nigeria’s primary anti-graft agency, convicted some key political stalwarts (three former governors and party chieftains) for corruption.

The year 2015 was another round of general elections; it was a bitter campaign, full of unsubstantiated and even ad hominem allegations between the spokespersons of the two major parties, All Progressive Congress (APC) and People’s Democratic Party (APC). The APC candidate, General Mohammodu Buhari won; indeed, the occasion when supporters on both sides were threatening fire and brimstone provided Goodluck Jonathan the opportunity to act the quintessential statesman by quietly throwing in the towel and congratulating the opposition. His bon mot was that his ambition was not worth the blood of any Nigerian (Okonjo-Iweala, 2018).

President Buhari has remained in power, having won the re-election in 2019. The situation throws up further grounds for the contestations. The initial notion of power shift, nay, notion of rotation, has not been adhered to as power has returned not just to the North but to the same Katsina State where the late Yar’Adua came from. The situation was much to the chagrin of some regions such as South East which has never produced a civilian President.

The real potentials of democracy may not always be fully harvested because of the nature of its practice. The practice may facilitate or impede participation. In Nigeria, the determining factor is ethnicity as well as gender.

**Political Participation and Exclusion in the States**

At the state level the main elective offices are representatives to the House of Representatives; the Senate; and the Governor as well as chairman of the various local councils. Elections to the National Assembly from the states are mostly through some negotiation, agreement and “deal” which recognizes rights of the various zones to participation. In most cases, there are some principles of rotation from one zone (based on the three senatorial zones in each state) for all positions. Through zoning, or simply an arrangement which gives various constituents the opportunity to select who will represent them. Typically, the position of Senator is rotated in many states between the three senatorial zones. This arrangement provides a sense of participation and belonging.
The big political prize in the States is the Governorship. This is not just to create a sense of belonging but because Governors have wide ranging powers to allocate resources, make appointments as well as cite projects such as roads, schools and hospitals. The office of the Governor is similarly zoned. There are however instances where zoning is not respected; or where zoning excludes some other stakeholders. We provide two contrasting cases of Plateau and Benue states.

Governorship elections in Plateau State

As is true of other states, Plateau has gone through six rounds of elections. In each, there were fierce contests for the office of Governor and the major parties have candidates from the same senatorial zone in conformity with the zoning arrangement. An important factor in Plateau state elections is the absence of an overwhelming ethnic group. While the Berom (Northern zone), the Taroch and Goemai (Southern zone), and the Mwaghavul and Ngas (Central zone) are the larger ethnic groups, none is large enough to win state-wide elections without coalitions with the 50 others.

Table 1: Governorship elections and zoning in Plateau State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electoral Cycle</th>
<th>Governor elected</th>
<th>Senatorial Zone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999-2003</td>
<td>Joshua Dariye</td>
<td>Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2007</td>
<td>Joshua Dariye</td>
<td>Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2011</td>
<td>Jonah Jang</td>
<td>Northern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2015</td>
<td>Jonah Jang</td>
<td>Northern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-2019</td>
<td>Simon Lalong</td>
<td>Southern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-2023</td>
<td>Simon Lalong</td>
<td>Southern</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source:  https://www.plateau.gov.ng/plateau/past-administrators; accessed December 9, 2020

Through the zoning arrangement, the governorship has rotated (see table above) from one Senatorial zone to the other. There was some controversy in 2015 when the incumbent Governor was accused of ignoring the formula and foisting his cousin on the party as the flag bearer. This was reckoned as the “Adashe formula”; Adashe is a savings scheme through which all members contribute an agreed sum at an agreed rotatory interval. When all have received, the process starts again from where it ended. The electorate ignored the adashe formula proposed by the Governor which would have voided the zoning arrangement (it would have yielded two northern zonal governors in succession) and voted instead for the candidate from the Southern zone in accordance with the zoning formula. Through the same arrangement it would next be the turn of the Central senatorial zone to produce the governorship candidate. This agreement provides for a sense of belonging, the main contest then shifts to being selected as the representative of the zone.
Zoning and Governorship elections in Benue State

In Benue State the contest for governorship is equally fierce. The state has some peculiarities in population configuration in which the Tiv comprises over half, perhaps up to two-thirds, of the state. It is frequently argued that democracy is a game of numbers and *ipso facto* the majority wins. The Tiv are in Senatorial zones A and B while the Idoma and other minorities (Igedde, Akweya, Ufia) are in zone C. As the table below shows, the rotation of the governorship position has been restricted to the Tiv speaking zones to the exclusion of the Idoma and others. Zones A and B also have minorities such as the Utange, Etulo and the Nyifon who do not feature in the governorship contests.

The Benue case contrasts with Plateau where the zoning arrangement provides for more participation, a sense of belonging and inclusion. Unlike Benue, Plateau has up to 57 ethnic groups (Alubo, 2011a, 2011b), none of which has overwhelming majority. Indeed, rather than the numbers, the principle of inclusion and participation facilitated the election of Joshua Dariye, a Mushere, one of the smallest ethnic groups in Plateau.

Table 2: Governorship elections and zoning in Benue State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electoral Cycle</th>
<th>Governor elected</th>
<th>Senatorial Zone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999-2003</td>
<td>George Akume</td>
<td>Northwest, also called zone B (Jemgbah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2007</td>
<td>George Akume</td>
<td>North-west, also called zone B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2011</td>
<td>Gabriel Suswam</td>
<td>North-East, also called zone A (Sankera)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2015</td>
<td>Gabriel Suswam</td>
<td>North-East, also called zone A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-2019</td>
<td>Samuel Ortom</td>
<td>North-west, also called zone B (Minda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-2023</td>
<td>Samuel Ortom</td>
<td>North-west, also called zone B</td>
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The experience in Benue shows some zoning/rotation between the Tiv speaking people; from Zone B to A and back to Zone B. By this arrangement it would next be the turn of Kwande in zone A. The rotation is within the Tiv clans and lineages are mostly the bases for the calculation; the lineages are Jemgbah which comprises Gboko, Tarka and Buruku; Jechira made up of Vande-Ikya and Konshisha. Other divisions are Sankera made of Katsina-ala, Ukum and Logo; and Minda( which began as Masaev-Iharev Development Association is now reckoned as a division in Tiv). Minda is made up of Guma, Makurdi, Gwer East and Gwer West. The history indicates a succession of Tiv Governors: Aper Aku was from Kwande; (Kwande comprises Kwande and Ushong) ; Moses Adasucame from Jechira which comprises Vande-Ikya and Konshisha. In this way, the Tiv speaking areas have some sense of belonging and participation in the running of the State. They have produced Governors, the position which besides being the number one citizen of the state, exercises control over projects and contracts which are essential part of economic development. Omitted from the zoning arrangement, Zone C plays the second fiddle perpetually appointed as the Deputy Governor.
Consequently, some sense of alienation and exclusion in the zone is almost palpable. As 2023 approaches, there are efforts to make the race more inclusive of all zones. Through a broad-based coalition of civil society groups, the Benue Rebirth Movement, is campaigning for Zone C to produce the next governor (personal communication). This is a state-wide campaign which could potentially lead to the much coveted inclusion of zone C. Only time will tell whether this will come to pass.

The challenge here is the extent of inclusion/exclusion and alienation in the democratic process. It cannot be that population alone is the deciding factor. The situation demands more deliberate attempts for inclusion. As we have seen in Plateau, zoning can provide opportunities for participation even for the minorities. The Benue State situation suggests that until more determined and all-inclusive attempts to resolve exclusion are made, the alienation and exclusion portend to continue. This then is an illustration of how ethnic origins can determine the nature and quality of participation of other smaller groups through politics of numbers. Such situation is replicated in other places where ethnicity and/or religion impedes and/or facilitates participation of the majority and minorities. In Kogi State, the other ethnic groups have similar complaints about how the Igala have used their numerical superiority to dominate the others. They continue to produce the governor until recently when in a spate of court cases, an Igbirra became the governor. In Kebbi State, the Christian minorities in the Zuru area complain that they are always excluded from ever becoming Governor.

**Gender and the Struggles for Public Space**

The politics of access to and control of the public space also relates to women. The contestations here include all spaces such as community, local council, state and the federal levels where they are virtually excluded. Research (Ibrahim & Salihu, 2004; Ogbuagu 2002; Simbine, 2002) has shown that irrespective of military or civilian regime, the number of women in government are few and far between. In almost 32 years of military rule, there was no female Governor or in the highest policy making body, the Armed Forces Ruling Council. The dawn of democracy did not significantly change the situation; women voted, stood for elections but hardly won. Thus:

During the last (1999) general elections, women constituted about 27 million out of the 47 million eligible registered voters but only 1.6% of them won elections. Women membership of political parties...... in 1999 was 5%, female party executives were 7% and women who qualified as delegates stood at 8%..... Out of the 49 Ministers and Presidential Advisers.....only 6 were women; only 4 of 52 ambassadors were women (Agina-Ude, 2003:3).
Table 3: Elective offices available and number won by women

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>3(2.8)</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>4(3.7)</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House of Rep</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>12(3.3)</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>21(5.8)</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Governor</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1(2.8)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate of Assembly</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>12(1.2)</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>38(3.8)</td>
<td>990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHA Committees</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>18(2.2)</td>
<td>881</td>
<td>32(3.6)</td>
<td>887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.G.A Chairpersons</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>9(1.2)</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>15(1.9)</td>
<td>740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillors</td>
<td>8,810</td>
<td>143(0.02)</td>
<td>6368</td>
<td>267(42)</td>
<td>6368</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The trend in the representation of women is uneven; it increased from 12/360 in 1999, to 21/360 in 2003 but went down to 19/360 in 2015. As shown in the table below, there was a marginal increase to 69/360 in 2019.

Table 4: Female elected positions, candidates and representation by major parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positions</th>
<th>Total Number of Candidates</th>
<th>Number of Position</th>
<th>Number of Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>APC Female Candidates</td>
<td>PDP Female Candidates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>1,904</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House of Rep</td>
<td>4,680</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>2,412</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy</td>
<td>2,412</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Assembly</td>
<td>14,583</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>1,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26,137</td>
<td>1,487</td>
<td>2,970</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Centre for Democracy and Development, 2019,

The same poor representation of women applies to boards and parastatals, the crucial agencies for the implementation of government policies. In the 1999-2003:

Of the 130 federal boards, only 7 are chaired by women, representing 5.6 per cent. If the 30 per cent earlier promised women [in ruling People Democratic Party manifesto] were to be upheld, women would chair 39 of Boards out of the 130 so far announced…out of the 833 appointed members so far…women representing 10.3 per cent (Gimiya cited in Simbine, 2002:150).

In the two general elections after 1999, the gross under-representation of women persisted. After the 2003 elections the Senate with a membership of 109 had only three women while the 360
strong House of Representatives had only 12 women (Egwu, 2004:25). By the 2007 elections the number of women in the House of Representatives increased to 30 and the number in the Senate increased to nine.

This situation is replicated at state and local council levels. In the 2003-2007 period Benue state with four out of 26 legislators had the highest number of female representatives in the country. By the 2007, this number had reduced to two. However, there are gains as in others aspects, Benue had the only female local council chair in the North Central zone.

Experiences in Nasarawa and Kaduna States show that women aspiring to political office faced formidable challenges. First, if they are married to people outside their states of origin, they confront a double jeopardy as they are disowned by both states. For the first, she is said to no longer belong, while the second treats her as “outsider”. In this way, she is not perceived as belonging to any space. Even if married within the state, she is regarded as excluded from politics. Second, women who run for politics are called unflattering names and their husbands come under intense pressure not to allow their wives run for elective office. Third, women are generally less knowledgeable (in most of Nigeria, they are less educated) about the political process and may not know what is involved. Finally, they receive less support both from the communities and parties supposedly because politics is outside their sphere of activities. This virtual exclusion is also rationalized by religion and culture (Alubo, 2008). But democracy is fundamentally about how the people participate in decision making and take control over their lives. When this important mission is blocked by erected obstacles, the situation indicates some contraption in the name of democracy.

What is required are policy changes to foster more participation of the excluded. Rwanda has led the way in the 2013 passage of legislation which provides 30% of all positions in decision making organs to women. By 2013, the country has about 64% of women parliamentarians making it the country with world’s highest number of women in the legislature, much higher than the often cited examples of Scandinavian countries (Wallace, Haepfer & Abbot, 2009). Attention in Rwanda has turned to how political representation can leverage on improvements in access to education, health and economic activities for women.

In a similar vein, African Americans were completely marginalised in participation in decisions about how the USA was run. There were periods of outright discrimination symbolized by the Jim Crow laws, segregation in schools, cinema houses and even in public buses. It took massive efforts of the Civil Rights Movement and necessary legislation to give them a vote and access the same education and other opportunities as available to whites (Maduagwu, 2019; Anderson, 2004). In addition to universal suffrage, more educational and employment opportunities, the Civil Rights Movement brought an end to the so called “separate but equal” facilities. The gains were most eloquently brought home by the 2008 election of an African American, Barack Obama, the President...
of the United States. Also in 2020 elections, Kamarla Harris, another African American was elected Vice President with Joe Biden as the President. Nigeria has a lot to learn from these experiences rather than continued pretension that a system which excludes women and minorities is being consolidated.

It is a truism that existing structures of exclusion and alienation serve some power and power concedes nothing without a demand. The examples cited above were achieved through popular mobilization of civil society groups. With respect to the US, a broad coalition of African Americans and others fought Jim Crows laws and segregation (Anderson, 2004; Maduagwu 2019). The struggle was ignited, among others, by a lowly seamstress, Rosa Parks, who defiantly refused to surrender her seat to a white man in a sequence of events which culminated in the 13-month Montgomery Alabama bus boycotts. There are several other heroes such Martin Luther King. In a similar manner, the post genocide reconstruction of Rwanda brought about the legislation for 30% quota to women in all decision-making positions.

Nigeria has a plethora of civil society groups which have raised their voices consistently, especially in critical periods. They successfully killed the bill which sought to regulate non-governmental organisations in 2018. The task ahead is a further challenge which they, including the female focussed groups, can more effectively canvass to end political alienation and exclusion.

**Conclusion**

This essay has shown that realizing more participation in the political process continues to dog Nigeria. As the theoretical section showed, what happens in the public space is a game of power and control; groups and individuals who have less power and economic means tend to lose out. Irrespective of existing constitutional provisions, the practice reveals more exclusion of the minority ethnic groups and women. Participation at the federal and state levels is skewed in favour of ethnic majority groups and the dominant gender. Democratic rule on its own only provides opportunities for more participation and inclusion; the practice determines which groups participate more or suffer exclusion. Perhaps, a way out would be more specific constitutional provision. In relation to gender certain percentage of elective and appointive offices (decision-making positions) should, as a constitutional issue, be allocated to women in all three tiers. If left to ‘politicking,’ Nigeria may have to contend for long with states which practise more gender equity and others which do not; some states have not even had a female LGA chair. Inserting the principles of rotation in the constitution would provide for more participation of minority ethnic groups. Such rotation could be based on the geo-political areas for the presidency; senatorial zones for governorships and wards for the LGA chairman. This proposal, which may not entirely eliminate marginalization, should bring Nigeria closer to the ideals of offering more participation and inclusion in decision-making; democracy should not become an end in itself which reinforces all existing structures of domination. The Nigerian project has to include a sense of belonging and participation away from the current practice of exclusion and alienation.
References


Democracy and Challenges of Participation and Exclusion in Nigeria


