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**WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN AFRICA AND  
ASIA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examined the state of women political participation and representation in Africa and Asian continents. Relying on secondary data comprised of books and journal articles, descriptive qualitative design, and the liberal democratic theory as a framework of analysis, several results emerged. Emerged results showed positive increase in women political participation and representation in several government levels in both Africa and Asia, but not without challenges. It revealed some of the challenges working against women to include religion, cultural beliefs, male dominance, lack of family support and poor financial resources in both continents. Other include poor education, political violence, weak political institutions, stereotype, and insult from the menfolk. These are in sharp contrast to the teachings and

principles of liberal democratic theory and democratic governance. In a democracy, every citizen including women have the right to participate, elect and be elected for public office which is the hallmark of democracy. In both continents, however, upward movement in women political participation and representation is evident, but they continue to suffer degrees of discrimination and marginalization from their menfolk and the political system. The above shows the need for political leaders to adhere to their constitution, teachings of liberal democracy, quota measures amongst other policies to remedy the predicament of women in public life. It would throw-up a better order, women would be represented, and democracy consolidated. There is a need to expand the research to other continents as it would be useful to women, policymakers, and researchers.

**Keywords:** Africa and Asia, democratic governance, gender, political participation, women.

## INTRODUCTION

In democracies, the place of women and their vital contributions in building societies, as well in democratic consolidation, cannot be overemphasized. This is because democracy offers the common people the opportunity to take part in the governance processes of their society as sovereignty belongs to them (Kumar, 2020; Azmi, 2020; Fashagba et al., 2019). According to Isma'ila and Othman (2016), democracy is a form of government where power to govern, elect and be elected for is derived from the people. On this note, it simply shows that in democratic governance, all the citizens enjoy the constitutional and legal right to participate and be well represented in the government, and this include women. In Africa, just like the Asian continent, many of the countries gained their independence in middle and late 19<sup>th</sup> century and adopted democratic governance after the 'Cold-War Era' also known as the era of democratization (Isma'ila & Othman, 2016; Isma'ila, 2016). It is on these bases therefore, that study tried to examine and understand the state of women political participation and representation in Africa and Asian continent. This is holding to the fact that in democracy, sovereignty belongs to the people and people have the equal right to participate in the governance processes of their society.

There are also several studies conducted in both local and international levels in this regard. In Africa for example, the works of Oshewolo and Adedire (2019), Barnes and Burchard (2013), Tripp (2016), CoD (2017) and others. While in Asian continent, we have works of Louis (2020), Rhoads (2012), Firdaus (2019), Prihatini (2019) and so on. However, with these available body of literatures, none was found to concentrate on the two continents of Africa and Asia to determine the state of women political participation and representation. It is on this account, therefore, that this study tried to explore the continents to fill the gap and contribute to the body of knowledge which would be of immense benefit to women and policymakers in the continents.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Political Participation:** In contemporary democracies, the concept of political participation amongst states and their citizens remains a burning issue. This is because in a democratic governance, it is the right of every citizen either man or woman to participate in the political and governance processes of their state. It also holds to the fact that the sovereignty of the state and the authority of the government are derived from the people (Oke, 2010). Political participation as revealed by Conway (2000) has to do with the involvement of all citizens including women in the governance processes of the state to influence state policies, election of representatives as well as the structure of governance. In a liberal democratic culture that encourages freedom and equality of every citizen, people are expected to engage in political processes which include contesting public office, voting in elections, or be active in party activities (Conway, 2000).

Similarly, development and consolidation of any democratic governance hinges on the actual participation of the common citizens in politics and civic affairs (Falade, 2014). This is because they must be involved in the discussion of issues that affect their lives, their rights, goals to achieve and how to achieve them (Adelekan, 2010). As argued by Abubakar (2012), citizens political participation is a long age practice in many societies. Unlike in authoritarian or monarchical system where people's participation is often restricted, democratic governance provides them with free opportunity to take part in the governance processes of their society. The essence as noted by Arowolo and Aluko (2010), either in a primitive or civilized democracy, is to

contest for public office, influence the decision-making processes and harness the distribution of public resources. In this context, therefore, no citizen including women must be discriminated in the governance processes of their society.

**Women Political Participation:** This concept as derived above simply means the free participation and representation of women in the political processes of their society. On this, Kumar (2017) observed that active involvement of women and equality with their male counterparts in all political processes and decision-making in a democratic governance, remains critical for peace, stable political and economic development, and democracy solidification. In his study, however, he found that despite the capacity of women to contribute positively in decision-making processes in their society, they still face various obstacles and discriminations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and worldwide when it comes to political participation. Confirming this, Barnes and Burchard (2013) observed that there is a huge gender gap between men and women in political engagement but varies across democracies and within democracies. According to Community of Democracies (CoD) (2017), even though discussion on women empowerment and representation remains a global agenda, its realization is still far, challenging and calls for more positive efforts. They concluded that despite the importance of women political participation even in the parliament amongst other public sectors, the political realm remains most challenging for their involvement in politics.

The above was supported by Mlambo et al. (2019). They revealed that women in various democracies, socioeconomic and political levels still find themselves underrepresented. To address this matter, Uwa et al. (2018), Oshewolo and Adedire (2019), and Fashagba et al. (2019), observed the Beijing Conference Declaration of 1995, which recommended 30 women representation in governance and decision-making in all nations, but it appears yet to be achieved. Mlambo et al. (2019) concluded that the 30% recommendation is even still halfway to 50% target by the Protocol on Gender and Development (PGD) of 2008. This is a clear indication that women are still underrepresented across democracies and Africa and Asia may not be exception. It does not also reflect the ethics of a liberal democratic governance which encourages free participation of all citizens in governance processes.

**Women Political Participation in Africa:** Africa is one of the six continents of the world that is also in the business of democratic

governance. The adoption of democracy as a model of governance came at the end of the 'cold-war era' also known as the third-wave era of democratization. Just like in other continents where democracy encourages political participation of citizens including women, the African continent is not an exception. In this respect, therefore, the focus is on the state of women political participation and representation in African democracies. On this, Barnes and Burchard (2013) relying on Afro-barometer data to determine women representation in the parliament in 20 African countries between 1999-2008, they found that their number increased, and gender gap decreased. They found that decrease in gender gap occurred not due to disengagement of men in the political realm but due to women activeness in political engagement. They added that achieving 50% equality representation of women in the parliament is not necessary but enjoying 25% to 35% political representation is necessary. They concluded that implementation of gender quotas for women representation would not only represent the interest of women but would benefit economic and political development and democratic consolidation.

In the same vein and relying on women organizations or movements to determine women representation in the African parliament, Tripp (2016) found a good increase in women representation between 1990-2015. He argued that women movements and the introduction of electoral quotas promote women political representation. He added that women representation in the African parliaments increased from 7.78% to 22.2% between 1999-2015. There are also about 12 women speakers in many parliaments across Africa and about 20% in the cabinet against other parts of the globe considered to be 18% within the same period. Drawing samples from Algeria, Mauritania, and Senegal, he concluded that democratization, external pressures, post-conflict impacts, commitment towards leadership, women movement and mobilization encourage their increase and women often sort the full implementation of the quota system. Quota measure can increase women political representation in politics and there is no doubt it if well implemented.

Digressing from the above, however, Community of Democracies (CoD) (2017) observed that there is no question that women in some parts of Africa like Rwanda amongst others, have made significant gains in political representation and gender gap reduction, they still suffer a great deal of gender gap in the realm of politics, economic opportunities, and basic human rights. They believe that women

occupy half of the world's population and therefore merit equal access with men not only in political participation and decision-making, but in education, health, economy and earning potential. As they conclude, gender equality is basic to how societies and democracies thrive.

According to Edigheji (2006), women political representation represents a basic component for democratic governance. In Africa, however, it remains a serious challenge to democratic development and consolidation. He concluded that a responsive public policy and political system that could meet the aspirations and needs of the common Africans, depends on an inclusive political system that offers the ordinary citizens including women a voice in public policy choices and governance. Also, Isaksson et al. (2014) who based their study on 20 African democracies and drawing from 27,000 respondents, found that employment, individual resource endowments, religious and cultural affiliations impact on women political participation. Others include restricted civil liberties, clientelism, gender norms and economic resources. They concluded that in West Africa, for example, gender gap in terms of voting in an election is greatly influenced by political violence. Though great number of women participate in voting, the impact of political violence scares not only the women away but amongst other people who cannot stand it. Also, using Afro-Barometer, Ighobor (2015) found that 72% of Africans believe that women and men should enjoy equal opportunity in the distribution of political office, but the absence of this majority view in some parts of the African continent remains a huge challenge to women.

For instance, Ighobor (2015) further revealed that while in East Africa, 74% of the respondents agreed on women political equality, Southern Africa agreed 73%, and in North Africa, only 50% accepted women's equal rights with their menfolk. In Sudan, however, 53% of the respondents reject women leadership, and 50% of the Egyptians followed the same pathway. This could simply be explained from the perspective of religion, culture and poor family support in Sudan and Egypt. Ighobor concluded that there are reasons why women should be given significant opportunity to participate in public leadership. According to him, leadership experts agree that women are vital in the breeding of new politicians who would promote and consolidate democratic governance in Africa. Unarguably, the role of African women in politics, social, economic, and societal development cannot be undermined. They represent a great potential in democratic

consolidation. Even though they may not achieve equal representation with men, the need to encompass their contribution in decision-making and public life remains sacrosanct for the thrive of positive democracy in African continent. Notwithstanding the above general review and scholarly views, independent review was also considered in countries like Nigeria, Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. They are reviewed below and starting with Nigeria.

**Nigeria:** A country in West Africa and its women constitute half of the nation's population and equally play important roles as mothers, time-managers, organizers, political and economic activists (Agbalajobi, 2010; Dim & Asomah, 2019). They also bring dynamism in the global environment (Oni, 2014). The example of their global dynamism could be seen in Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and Amina Mohammed, United Nation's Deputy Secretary-General amongst others. However, literatures revealed that despite their huge population and important roles under the nation's fourth republic democratic governance, the Nigerian society and the political system has not only failed to recognize their roles but succeeded in their discrimination. This aligned with the previous findings (Agbalajobi, 2010; Anigwe, 2014; Arowolo & Aluko, 2010; Chuku, 2009; Dim & Asomah, 2019; Jacob et al., 2012; Luka, 2011; Oni, 2014; Orisadare, 2019). According to Jacob et al. (2012), Nigerian women are discriminated by their menfolk in both voting and allocation of political offices. They are highly underrepresented in politics amongst other public leadership positions compare to the menfolk (Dim & Asomah, 2019). This practice contradicts the ethos of democracy and cannot promote democratic liberty and consolidation in the country. The above also aligns with findings of Khodair and Hassib (2015); Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2015) in Egypt in North Africa.

**Rwanda:** A country in East-Central Africa with a single-party system against the projection of a multi-party system in democracy. While some see Rwanda as authoritarian, others call it a less democratic system. However, with regards to women political participation, Bauer and Burnet (2013) in comparison with Botswana, a democracy with a multi-party system in Southern Africa using quota system, they found that in Botswana, gender quota crusades succeeded in promoting



awareness amongst the people. However, it failed to realize quotas as women representation in the parliament remains low and continues to fall short. In Rwanda, however, constitutional gender quota and party quotas promote women majority in the parliament and highest in the world with 56% (Bauer & Burnet, 2013; Burnet, 2011; Hogg, 2009). They further found African democracies with low women representation and without electoral gender quota like Rwanda to include Nigeria, Liberia, and Ghana. The above only points that democracy does not guarantee women representation if a single party system like Rwanda could have more women representation. Allying with the above, Guariso et al. (2017) also revealed that like in Burundi, women political participation and representation in Rwanda increased through gender quotas as women enjoy beyond 30% representation in both parliament and government ministries. Challenges as they concluded, women occupy lower ministries but the gender gap with menfolk is closing. Amongst others are increased conflict with men, men withdrawing from politics and marital crisis. The challenges can be traced to culture, but women participation represents the ethics of a democratic governance.

**Kenya:** As one of the African countries, it is situated in East-Africa. With perspective on women representation, Bouka et al. (2019), Kachambwa (2018), Opoku et al. (2018), and Kivoi (2014) all observed that to promote gender equality and women political participation and representation, the Kenyan Constitution of 2010 in Article 27(3) projected two-third representation for women in government. Using 30 respondents comprised of 19 women and 11 men, Opoku et al. (2018) found low women representation as violent political environment and discrimination remain responsible. According to Kivoi (2014), Kenyan women are underrepresented and marginalized in the executive and the parliament. Cultural stereotypes, perceptions and beliefs continue to project women as inferior, and the political leaderships have failed in their policy implementation of two-third required, he concluded. Bouka et al. (2019) revealed that notwithstanding that their elections in 2017 increased the number of women in governance, women have continued to remain underrepresented. It has also led to several protests in the country (Kachambwa, 2018). As he added, out of 349 seats in the legislature, women occupy only 7 which represents 1/5 rather than 117 as two-third projected by the 2010 Constitution, therefore, falling short of 41 seats. In the Senate also, women occupy 21 seats rather than 23 established by law. According to Kachambwa (2018), these



indicate gender imbalance in Kenyan politics as women occupy on 23.5% space compare to its neighbors in East Africa. For example, Rwanda heads with 61%, Tanzania and Burundi, 36% both, Uganda, 34% and South Sudan, 28.5%. And, only in 2017 election, six women were elected as governors in Kenya, he concluded. The whole thing points to underrepresentation and therefore, calls for the political will to fully implement the two-third projection in the 2010 Constitution.

**Ghana:** Just like Nigeria, Ghana is also one of the countries in West Africa and shares the same journey of democracy with other African countries. With respect to Ghanaian women, literatures show that 50 to 60% of them occupy the agricultural sector which represents the largest second sector in Ghana (Bawa & Sanyare, 2013). To ensure their political participation and representation in governance also, the constitution offers them equal right with the menfolk (Sossou, 2011). Based on this, Shiraz (2015) found that though Ghanaian women continue to make a considerable progress not only in political participation but in other sectors of public governance. However, he further noted that despite their efforts, myriads of challenges ranging from religion, culture and economic factors continue to work against their effective participation. Others include low education, patriarchy belief, and lack of family support. According to Odame (2010), the low women participation at both national and local leaderships in Ghana ranges from lack of confidence and the perception that politics is for men. This perception, Bawa and Sanyare (2013) revealed, emanates from their past colonial experience. Also, women who eventually even contest during elections had to deal with name-callings from those who discriminate their involvement in politics. Consequently, they often lost to their menfolk not due to incompetence but gender inequality and discrimination. For instance, Alhassan et al. (2020) using a registered sample of 225 Ghanaian nurses to determine their political participation, the result revealed low participation. They found barriers as absence of trust in politicians, political violence, poor political education, and therefore, call for more inclusion of women in politics. Political violence and poor women representation do not represent the ethics of democracy, and therefore, calls for inclusiveness.

**Tanzania and Ethiopia:** These two countries are both located in East-Africa and operate a democratic governance. With regards to women political participation and representation, Losindilo et al. (2010)

using multiple logistic regression instrument found that in Tanzania, place of residence, religion, age groups and education contribute differently to low women political participation. Supporting the above, Grabe (2015) revealed that underrepresentation of women in politics is not only a Tanzanian problem but a global issue. Relying on 225 respondents from northern Tanzania, Grabe further found that women with lands amongst other wealth in the society stand a better chance to be successful in Tanzanian politics. All these point to low women political participation in Tanzania as those without wealth stand to be disfranchised. While in Ethiopia, Kassa (2015) observed that despite the huge population and attention being giving to women political participation around the world, and its capability to address women challenges in the society, women have continued to remain underrepresented in both governance and decision-making in many societies and Ethiopia inclusive. In Ethiopia, both Bayeh (2016) and Kassa (2015) revealed religion, abysmal violation, economic, social, and cultural belief as factors working against women in public life. Tanzania and Ethiopia are democratic nations, but the practices obtainable with regards to women political participation negates liberal democratic principles.

**South Africa and Zimbabwe:** The two nations are both democracies and are in the southern part of the African continent. Relying on literatures, Mervis (2013) revealed that many democracies have failed to promote women political participation in their societies. Making a comparison of democracies and authoritarian regimes, he found that about 11 autocratic regimes with flawed democracies have women as heads of government and states, while democracies have only 6 women. He added that just like in United Kingdom, political parties and government in Zimbabwe lack commitment to promote women political participation notwithstanding their importance to national development. As he concluded, democracy does not guarantee women participation in governance as seen from autocratic regimes, and in Zimbabwe, religion, illiteracy, patriarchy, poverty and absence of economic and political ability to influence foreign and domestic policies have continue to work against women. While in South Africa, Makgale and Chibwe (2019) observed upward shift just like in other countries of the African continent, but still falls short to realize gender parity. For example, they revealed that in Pan-African legislature, women representation increased from 20% to 30%. In the South African 2019 elections, women realized 23 seats across all political parties and their number in the National Assembly increased to 45%.

According to them, the 45% increase in the legislature represents a huge success given that they were only 2.7% prior to 1994 and stood at 27% in 1994. In the provincial level after the 2019 elections also, women representation rose from 30% to 43%. Limpopo province achieved the greatest women proportion and with women occupying 35% seats in the parliament, surpassing gender parity standard set by South African Development Community (SADC). Western Cape has the lowest in the provincial parliament with only 35%. In the whole, they concluded, South Africa has recorded a huge progress in the continent and arguably, remains amongst the parliaments with gender diversity around the world. While it ranks tenth globally, it remains number three in the African continent, but still falls low in realizing gender parity. It informs an upward progression, as democracy involves continues learning and practice. It is far better than Zimbabwe amongst other African democracies. There is more to do in Africa to promote gender parity in politics.

**Women Political Participation in Asia:** Just like African continent, Asia is one of the six continents of the world and with several democracies too. When it also comes to women political participation, Asia is not left out. This is because in democratic governance, there is a wide believe that it offers opportunities for women political participation, representation, and advancement in public life (Choi, 2018). According to Liu (2020), political participation remains a crucial ingredient of democracy as it presents the common citizens including women the opening to relate with those in political leaderships to communicate their preferences. Going global, Liu added that while several variables are used to determine citizens' political participation in democracies, gender remains an active factor. Also, while literatures progressively reveal that gaps in gender are diminishing in the western democracies in relation to some political activities (Bode, 2017; Burns et al., 2018), results are also found that women political participation in Asia, Latin America and including Sub-Saharan Africa are low compare to their menfolk in public politics (Coffe & Dilli, 2015; Coffe & Bolzendahl, 2011; Desposato & Norrander, 2009; Espinal & Zhao, 2015). In Asia, and through a Barometer Survey of 2010, Liu (2020) found that in 13 countries of Southeast and East Asia, both women and men vote massively on equal ground in elections, but gender gap and marginalization continue to work against women in other forms of political engagements. In ESA, Liu concluded, the poor inclusiveness and marginalization of women

in politics often comes from the patriarchal and traditional belief that politics is for men. Though democracy as seen in Rwanda may not be an assurance for gender parity, Asian women need to enjoy their right to contribute politically to their society.

Similarly, True et al. (2012) who focused their study in Eastern Asia, South Asia, South-Eastern Asia, and the Island of the Asia-Pacific region. Their result showed that women political participation and representation on average is lowest with 3.65% in the Pacific subregion excluding New Zealand and Australia. East Asia records 17.6%, Southeastern Asia and Brunei have 18.09%, and 19.76 for South Asian women. In the four regions, they added, women political participation is low and does not match the global average required. Allying with Liu (2020), they argued that factors such as religion, customs and cultural beliefs are often used to marginalize women and men often believe that women have no place in politics. They further revealed that though reservations and gender quotas are playing significant role to improve their representation and could be seen in countries like Mongolia, Timor-Leste, Nepal, New Caledonia, Afghanistan and in nondependent areas of French Polynesia. Also, political parties particularly in unstable regimes in Asia-Pacific are usually family-control political ventures that allow elite women's involvement in politics but serve as obstacles to participation by the non-elite women. Violence against women defending human rights, speaking up in societies over political matters or contesting for public office is often common, particularly in the regions or countries affected by conflict in the Pacific and across Asia. They strongly discourage women political participation. They however concluded that civil society groups, political parties, religious organization, and women movements would do better to remedy the situation.

More so, using ethnographic research and drawing experience from countries like Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Philippines which are also Southeast Asia, Choi (2018) found that women's formal rights and their socioeconomic status have significantly improved in recent decades. However, she added, women remain underrepresented and marginalized in political participation and representation in the region. She further argued that while it is presumed that decentralization and democratization provide opportunity to women to expand their political advancement, such presumptions are yet to be practicalized in the Southeastern Asia. Across the region, she concluded, features

of political structures amongst other institutions appear formidable, but equally represent active instruments discouraging women full engagement in public life. The authors' findings all point to low women participation in politics and decision-making. It cannot augur well in advancing women's interest in the society and also in contrary with democratic teachings. For more consolidation of knowledge on the subject matter, experiences are further drawn from countries of India, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, Philippines below.

**India:** The hallmark of democratic governance and its effectiveness, Kumari (2020) reveals, lies in equal and effective political participation of all citizens. In India, which is a Southern Asia, he added that women occupy half of the population and therefore, need to be given their due share and attention in the political processes as it would not only make democracy more effective but consolidated. He argued that the Indian Constitution in Article 310 and 320 not only guarantees equal rights for the citizens but equal political participation in public life. However, his study revealed that women in India are not only denied equal political participation and representation in decision-making, but their common challenges are also neglected. According to Fadia (2014), women empowerment and equal political participation in Indian politics would not only have a positive influence on the women, but their children and their menfolk. However, he concluded that political parties in India continue to marginalize women and remain indifferent over issues that affect them notwithstanding that women population in the 2011 census was 586.5 million and approximately 48.46%. Even in the legislature, he concluded that women are less represented in comparison to their population. It is not a sign of good democracy. The above findings also support the findings of Jyoti and Durga-Rao (2020), Kumar (2020), and Rai (2017). The Indian politicians need to adhere to the provisions of their constitution and the Beijing 30% declaration to ensure that women are given their due rights in Indian politics.

**China:** This is one of the greatest countries in the East-Asian region. With respect to women political participation, however, Guo (2013) revealed that one of the greatest and remarkable phenomena worldwide in the last two decades remains the upward movement of women in politics. In China, however, he added, women are left behind as the level of their political participation remains low in comparison to

women in Western democracies. Women in China are marginalized, and gender play a lot of role in public life, he concluded. Their political liberalization and participation are completely zigzag and their call for gender equality remain challenging (Dongchao, 2011). While measures are being taken to increase their participation, several factors including absence of self-confidence to contest in elections and feudal beliefs continue to project women as inferior and men superior (Dongchao, 2011; Howell, 2006). This is despite their important role in society development. Allying with the above, Zeng (2014) found that despite the Chinese economic rapid growth which made her one of the greatest economies of the world and important roles of the Chinese in several socioeconomic activities, women political participation in recent decades refuse to improve significantly. As one of the greatest economies of the world, there is need to promote women political participation to cut the gender and to reduce some of their challenges in the society.

**Indonesia:** As one of the Asian democracies, it is in South-East Asia and with good population of women. In Indonesia for instance, Firdaus (2019) found that out of their 265 million population, women population is around 132 million, almost 50%. With regards to women political participation, she revealed that while Indonesian women are good with campaign skills, their place in political positions has refused to progress significantly. Their number of seats in the parliament is yet to reach 30%. Prihatini (2019) supports the above finding and further revealed that despite the introduction of open-list proportional participation and gender quotas amongst other political reforms, political dynasty and kinship continue to affect their nomination into public office. Also, culture, money politics, electoral violence, historical beliefs continue to work against women (Hillman, 2017; Rhoads, 2012). The authors agree that women movement and adherence to gender quota remain the surest remedy.

**Malaysia:** As a Southeast Asian democracy, Global Gender Gap Index in its gender disparity measurement in areas like education, health, political empowerment, economic opportunity, and participation, ranked Malaysia 111 out of 145 nations in 2016 (Azmi, 2020). In terms of women political participation, it recorded a low score due to absence of women in decision-making amongst other leadership positions in the society. This happened despite its 30% target for women contained in Article 8(2) of the 2001 Federal Constitution

(Azmi, 2020). According to Louis (2020), women in Malaysia are significant factor in determining who assumes public power and remain in power, but it also remains challenging issue when it comes to their representation in politics and leadership.

In 2019 as Louis added, statistics show that the total public representation of women was 24.7% in the legislature, and as managers and senior officials in the government. This, in comparison, does not represent the level of their enrollment in tertiary education that stood at 50.3% against 37.8% for men. Also, he further revealed that political parties often focus on issues of social conservatism, nationalism and regionalism but often pay little or no critical attention to issues of women empowerment and gender equality and thereby rendering women political participation unremarkable and volatile. For example, he concluded that in the 2018 Sabah state elections, out of 447 candidates, only 43 women contested which represents only 9%. In the parliament, women represent only 14.4%, and represent only 17.9% as cabinet ministers (Louis, 2020). These findings supported the findings of Sukhani (2020), Krishnan (2020), and Saidon et al. (2017). According to Sukhani (2020), only Pakatan Harapan party in 2018 appointed more women into power and Malaysia witnessed its first female Deputy Prime Minister, female Chief Justice, female anti-corruption Chief-Commissioner amongst others. This calls for more attention to women representation to promote and consolidate democracy in Malaysia.

**Pakistan:** This country is in Southeast Asia with a significant women population. With respect to women political participation, Latif et al. (2015) using purposive sampling technique, 20 respondents and 2 focus group discussions, they found low women political participation in Pakistan. They argued patriarchal mindset, economic deprivation, and religion as obstacles against women engagement in politics. Supporting the above, Rubab et al (2020) observed low representation and political participation of Pakistani women despite their huge population. Their voting turnout is always poor compared to their menfolk. Issues of poverty, patriarchal beliefs and religion remain their major challenge. There is need to increase their educational level, economic wellbeing, and affirmative policies to help them participate in decision-making effectively (Latif et al., 2015; Rubab et al., 2020). This would surely promote and consolidate democracy. Consolidating the above, Ahmad et al. (2019) revealed that in western



democracies, women political participation significantly improved, but in Asia, countries like Pakistan still behind. Using a structured interview administered on 414 women, his result showed a dominant belief that women should only engage in making and raising babies, care for their husband and parents and depend on their families. While women are left with private and secluded space, men are independent, involve in decision-making and enjoy public life. He concluded that these factors are institutionalized in Pakistani social structures, culture, and other social organizations. Such practices cannot promote women political participation as their political rights would remain in denial.

**Bangladesh:** Just like Pakistan, Bangladesh also represents one of the countries in the Southeast Asia. Women population is equally noted to be high, but very low when it comes to their political participation. According to Ara and Northcote (2020), gender walls such as institutional, historical, cultural, and socioeconomic factors affect women participating in politics at both local and federal level. Though there is the influence of modernization and affirmative policy action to reserve political space for women, despite this, women are still marginalized through patriarchal beliefs, he added. Societal expectations create challenges that prevent even educated women from venturing into politics (Folke & Rickne, 2016; Zamfirache, 2010). This cannot consolidate democracy in Bangladesh. Also, Islam and Islam (2012) who studied the degree of women political empowerment in Bangladesh local government level, Union Parishad. Their result showed that though through quota measures, the number of women in political participation have increased, but in decision-making, their level of representation remains very low. Religion, lack of experience, illiteracy and sociocultural factors serve as a challenge compared to their menfolk in politics (Islam & Islam, 2012). The whole thing shows that women are still underrepresented and marginalized against the doctrine of democratic governance and therefore, calls for urgent redress for inclusiveness.

**Thailand:** As one of the nations of Southeast Asia, Thailand remains one of the developing parliamentary democracies in the region. It has a good number of women populations compare to other democracies in the region. To ensure Thailand's women political participation, Romanow (2012) observed that their 1997 Constitution established equal right across gender. However, he added, despite this provision of

the constitution, women still face discrimination and marginalization in public decision-making. They are not only underrepresented in government but are equally mistreated at home by their male folk. As of the 2019 elections, records show that women occupy less than 6% seats in the Thai parliament (Madsen et al., 2019). Those who dare to contest for public office continue to suffer religion and stereotypes from men who believe they are too emotional, indecisive, and weak notwithstanding the provision of the constitution amongst other electoral reforms for gender equality, they concluded. Consequently, these practices and beliefs would discourage women from contesting or being voted in elections. According to Buranajaroenkij et al. (2018) and Lydia (2010), though their status is gradually changing and their number in public offices moving upward compared to 1990s. However, they still constitute minority in the parliament. Gender equality in politics in Thailand is yet to be realized. This, therefore, calls for urgent affirmative action.

Adding light to the above, Mala (2018) observed that in comparison to women in politics globally, Thailand is one of the democracies with the lowest rate of gender equality. According to Mala (2018), even in the United Nation's (UN) data in January 2017, only 4.9% of Thailand women were seen in the parliament. It became 184<sup>th</sup> in rank out of the 190-female representation in the parliament globally. He added that even at present, women occupy only 22% of national legislative positions worldwide, but with regards to Thailand, the rate of women is just 4.9%. This means that, he concluded, Thailand women are underrepresented and marginalized in all political processes in Thailand as factors like domestic chores, persistent cultural beliefs, and absence of family supports continue to work against them. Overcoming these challenges against Thai women is necessary as it would promote their participation in public life and equally create an enabling environment for democratic to thrive.

**Philippines:** This country is one of the developing democracies in the Southeast Asia with women population of 49.9% to 50.1% for men. In terms of women political participation, however, Hughes (2012) observe that almost all the world democracies including Philippines succeeded in designing various policies to promote women political participation and representation. Relying on hierarchical linear modeling to ascertain how quotas influence women political participation in not less than 300 racial, religious, and ethnic bodies

across 81 democracies including Philippines, he found a diverse result of predictable and non-predictable. He believes that quotas are designed ostensibly to promote and encourage inclusiveness and diversity in the political processes, but in effect today, they hardly challenge the dominance of men over women in most of the national legislatures including Philippines. The Philippine's Constitution, Dressel (2011) observed, provide a degree of directive principles to promote a dynamic just political social order for gender equity, but democracy has continued to remain a paradox in Philippines. As he added, there are signs of active civic engagement, high voter turnout, and institutional measures that theoretically encourage liberties, accountability, and safeguard of women rights, but flaws in democratic processes continue to work against women.

In Philippines, and notwithstanding its democracy, politics in several sphere of life is very much dominated by men, from the national to the smallest unit of government (Zapata, 2018). Many women who contest and aspire for public office often do so to promote development in their societies, as well to encourage gender equality in the system and their families remain their major source of motivation, he added. However, not coming from a political clan, gender biased opponents, poor public skill, gender biased voters, institutional weakness, widespread abuse of government office, poor financial means and elite dominance amongst other factors make women political participation and representation illusionary (Dressel, 2011; Zapata, 2018). These factors affect women political participation globally, not only in Philippines and they cannot consolidate democracy. Even though Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was the president between 2001-2010, that still does not mean that women are well represented in the democratic Republic of Philippines.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study relied on descriptive and narrative qualitative design to examine the level of women political representation and participation in Africa and Asian continents. The research design was used because of its potentiality to explain social and political events that has to do with women in public spheres in the continents (Colorafi & Evans, 2016; Creswell, 2013; Lambert & Lambert, 2012; Nassaji, 2015; Wright & McKeever, 2000). It helps a researcher to provide a more

valid and effective description and narration from a well-articulated thought over his object of investigation (Magilvy, 2003). This holds on the assumption that economic, social and political issues are often complex and therefore, cannot easily be quantified as they deal with the issues of thorough knowledge and comprehension of phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Colorafi & Evans, 2016; Lambert & Lambert, 2012; Nassaji, 2015; Wright & McKeever, 2000). The above edifying educational submissions with regards to this research design, show how rich, credible, and significant in comprehending not only women political participation in Africa and Asian continents but politics generally in other democracies and continents of the world. Materially, also, only secondary sources of information were employed to achieve the objective of the study which include journal articles and books from Fashagba et al. (2019), Shewolo and Adedire (2019), and Agunyai and Olawoyin (2019). To build linkages and consolidate knowledge, Liberal Democratic Theory was applied as a framework of analysis.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study used a liberal democratic theory not only as a framework of analysis but to equally comprehend, describe and explain the level of women political participation and representation in both Africa and Asian continents and democracies. Other theories like the Normative, Elitist or the Marxist democratic theory exist and can make inroads, but liberal democratic theory stands out when it comes to political inclusiveness in democracies. It also enjoys a widespread acceptance on its capacity to present a critical understanding of political inclusiveness. Be that as it may, however, Vincent and Tunde (2018) revealed Adam Smith, Rousseau, J.J., John Locke and B, Montesquieu as the major proponents of the theory. From the views of these proponents, Vincent and Tunde further observed that this theory of democracy enjoys the potentiality to define, describe and bring to knowledge the type of democratic governance being practiced in different democracies, and it still enjoys significant acceptability around the globe.

Addition to the above, Muhammad (2013), and Kwasu (2013) revealed the major thrust of the theory to lies in its projection that a democratic political system or governance must be the type that encourages and promotes fair political participation and representation of all citizens,

including women in the governance processes. These governance processes as they highlighted include free participation of citizens in a free and fair elections, the right of all to elect and be elected for public office without being hindered by race, gender, wealth, or property in the society. The theory proposes a political democratic system of dynamic and effective citizen participation and representation in the decision-making amongst other democratic processes of their nation to contribute and encourage good governance, liberty, citizens' rights, and consolidation of democracy (Vincent & Tunde, 2018). Therefore, based on the above, the use of the theory to examine and describe the state of women political participation in both Africa and Asian continents was observed as scholarly importance, apt and timely. It would help readers and leaders to easily understand what a liberal democratic governance stands for and the need to include women in the governance processes to protect their interest and consolidate democracy.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

To comprehend, describe and explain the state of participation and representation of women in politics in Africa and Asian continents, results were found from the legion of scholarly works reviewed. These results were discussed under the subheadings below.

**The State of Women Political Participation and Representation in Africa and Asia:** As most of the countries under these continents are liberal democracies with few exceptions, it is assumed that women with their huge population should enjoy gender equality with their menfolk in political participation and representation. On this regard, and in Africa for example, results emerged that there is gradual increase in women political participation but varies from democracy to democracy. This was confirmed by Barnes and Burchard (2013), Tripp (2016), CoD (2017), and Mlambo et al. (2019). According to Barnes and Burchard (2013), the increase of women in politics is effectively reducing the level of gender gap in the Sub-Saharan Africa amongst other places. This was equally supported by Tripp (2016) who observed women political participation and representation in African parliament increased tremendously. It increased from 7.78% to 22.2% from 1990 to 2015. In South Africa, for example, result showed that women realized 23 seats in the parliament across all parties and holds a proportion of 46% in the composition of national

legislature (Makgale & Chibwe, 2019). They increased by 11% compare to previous parliaments. In Rwanda also, result showed that in the parliament, women have the highest in the world with 56% representation (Hogg, 2009; Guariso et al., 2017; Bauer & Burnet, 2013). No doubt, it is a significant increase compare to what was obtainable before now but not without challenges of culture, religion, money amongst others.

In the Asian continent also, there are records of improvements in women political participation and representation. This could be seen in Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia amongst others (Liu, 2020; Louis, 2020; Prihatini, 2019; Sukhani, 2020). In Malaysia for example, during the reign of Pakatan Harapan, women were appointed as deputy prime minister, anti-corruption chief commissioner, female chief justice, five female ministers amongst other critical offices. While in Philippines, Gloria Macapaga was the President between 2001 to 2010. It was also a great improvement, but not without challenges too like women in Africa. In Asia just like Africa, the issue of gender gap, marginalization, religion, and cultural beliefs continue to work against women political participation (Choi, 2018; Kumari, 2020; Liu, 2020; True et al., 2012). While in Africa, Oshewolo and Adedire (2019) revealed that it is more worrisome and undefined given the persistent patriarchal culture amongst other social encumbrances that work against women. Both in Asia and Africa, there is a harmony of result that women are still being marginalized. The practice contradicts the principle of liberal democratic theory that projects equal gender representation. The is need for inclusive democracy to respect the rights of women and for democratic consolidation. Only then, liberal democracy can be assured and sustained in Asia and Africa.

### **Challenges of Women Political Participation in Africa and Asia:**

Despite the positive increase in women political participation and representation as seen in both continents, result also showed that a lot still need to be done. In these continents, result showed that women are underrepresented, marginalized, and restricted to private life. This was revealed from the findings of Fadia (2014), Jyoti and Durga-Rao (2020), Kumar (2020), and Fashagba et al. (2019) amongst others. According to Kumar (2020), political participation in all democratic processes offers an avenue to people including women to make their system and governance reflect their ambitions and aspirations. It also lends legitimacy to the government which is the benchmark of a liberal democratic system. Liberal democratic theory projects

a political system where all citizens would be able to participate in their governance process. However, as have seen, despite the little increase in women participation and representation, they are still heavily marginalized and discriminated in public life. It contradicts the teachings of a liberal democratic theory and therefore, calls for urgent redress to give women their rightful place in public sector for the consolidation of democratic governance.

## **CONCLUSION**

In liberal democracies, it is presupposing that all citizens should be involved in the governance processes. This is because in a democracy, government and sovereignty belong to the common citizens. The people have the right to decide who comes to public office and who stays. In this perspective, therefore, the study examined the state of women political participation and representation in Africa and Asian democratic continents. Relying on descriptive and narrative research design, secondary information, and liberal democratic theory as a framework of analysis, various results emerged. Results showed upward movement in women political participation and representation in both continents but with varying percentages in democracies. Results however emerged that despite the increase in their political participation, women are still highly underrepresented, marginalized and restricted to private life. Issues of cultural beliefs, religion, education, lack of family support and low financial resources work against women. In all, these contradict the ethics of a liberal democratic governance. Women are not only part of the society but are also builders. Therefore, there is need for more affirmative action to promote their rights and participation in governance processes in the society. The political leaders must adhere to the 30% Beijing declaration, respect their quota policies for women and the constitution as it would consolidate democratic practice in the continents. This research would benefit women, policymakers, and researchers. There is also the need to expand this research to other continents as it would help in addressing women challenges in public life.

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