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Patriarchy, Religion and Subjugation of Women in Nigerian Politics: A Case Study of Natasha Akpoti Uduagan.

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ABSTRACT

Existing literatures have focused on the underrepresentation of women in elective and appointive positions in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially in Nigeria, which is considered the giant of Africa. Meanwhile, little or no attention has been paid specifically to the subjugation and harassment of women politicians in elective and appointive positions in Nigeria. The attitude of people towards women politicians in Nigeria is generally unbecoming. It is often time hinged on the patriarchal and religious structures of African society, where women are believed to play supporting roles or are believed to be seen and not to be heard; given this concomitant erroneous dominion mentality of the patriarchal and religious structure of African society that placed women at the receiving end. This study reveals Natasha's story of women's subjugation in Nigerian politics, banking on the assumptions of Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy; this study explores explicitly the subjugation and harassment of women politicians using Natasha's story. The study employed an analytical approach and utilised secondary sources to gather information. The personal experiences of some women in politics were also explored. It was discovered that women politicians face much discrimination in both elective and appointive positions. The challenges of women politicians include but are not limited to intimidation, denial of opportunities, and, above all, sexual harassment. Unfortunately, it was discovered that some women in politics support their male colleagues in doing these evils against their fellow women. This study highlights the urgent need for change and urges scholars, researchers, and policymakers to take an active role in this transformation.

Keywords Natasha, Women, Subjugation, Nigeria, Politics

Introduction

The marginalization of women in Nigeria extends beyond the political arena; historically, women were relegated to the background in all aspects of life and denied equal opportunities to participate alongside their male counterparts, with their roles mostly confined to childbearing and raising. For example, Christianity emerged from male-dominated or patriarchal societies that placed men in the positions of authority in all spheres of life. In the Jewish culture, the status of women is portrayed clearly by the fact that women could not be counted to make up a quorum for public worship. Priesthood and leadership positions were primarily held by men (Fatokun, 2006). Women in Orthodox churches appear to be less valuable in the service of God. They are sometimes looked down on as less spiritual than men. This is evident in the Methodist and Anglican Churches, where women are only permitted to serve as Lay Readers (Fatokun, 2006).

The contributions of women to the socio-economic development of nations and cultures are not to be overlooked. They performed dual roles of production and procreation. Although, women have been subjugated to elective and appointed positions in political spheres of some countries, they still make up the larger percentage of registered voters especially in Nigeria (Okoronkwo-Chukwu, 2013). The 'invisible ceiling' is a powerful metaphor that captures the systemic and often subtle forms of discrimination and subjugation that women face in the political and religious arena. This metaphor helps us understand the structural and cultural factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in politics. The September 1995 Beijing conference, attended by over 30,000 activists and 5,000 media representatives from around the world, heightened and invigorated women's awareness of their rights, benefits, and injustices. Meanwhile, amidst the gleaming façade of Nigeria's democratic progress, where politics and commerce are economically intertwined, just as Adabembe (2024) has compared the interrelatedness of religion and commerce, lies a troubling reality: the subjugation of women in Nigeria's political arena, which has garnered the attention of scholars.

Nkereuwem (2023) established that women hold just about six per cent of elective positions in Nigeria, indicating that the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society has permeated several aspects of life, significantly impacting the subjugation of women in their representation and treatment meted out to them in politics. Consequently, the aspirations of women in Nigerian politics are overshadowed by a male-dominated political landscape. Akpan-Obong and Ette (2023) noted that women's political participation, as indicated by the 2019 results, is decreasing. The scholars affirmed that this is not unrelated to the fact that politics is often perceived as a male-dominated field, even among women. Thus, women who are into politics are 'outliers' in their words. Unfortunately, Nigerian political leaders have demonstrated this in several ways. For instance, the former President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, who served from 2015 to 2023, was quoted as saying, "I do not know which party my wife belongs to, but my wife belongs to my

kitchen, and my living room and the other room” (BBC, 2016). This statement by the number one citizen reveals the mentality of Nigerian men regarding women's societal role. The invisible ceiling for women in Nigerian politics is attributed to a confluence of sociocultural practices and religious beliefs. This is the account of Natasha, a trailblazing woman ensnared in a realm of institutional subjugation, sexism, and obstruction. This article utilizes Natasha's narrative to examine the processes that perpetuate women's exclusion and subjection in Nigeria's political landscape.

This study aims to identify the barriers hindering women's participation in politics. The studies also seek to initiate a national discourse on the need for gender equality in Nigerian democracy. Scholarly works have demonstrated that women's political participation and representation in Nigeria remain inadequate compared to other parts of the world (Adabembe & Adedayo, 2022). The percentage of women's representation is at an average of 6.7% in both elective and appointive positions, which is far below the global average of 22.5%, Africa's regional average of 23.4%, and West African sub-regional average of 15% (Oloyede, 2015).

Literature

Adesanya and Adabembe (2022) maintained that there is a need to involve as many women as possible in Nigeria's political and economic development, which requires considerable encouragement and liberation from persistent injustice and alienation against women. While Prasad and Thampi (2021) argued that there has been a steady but slow increase in women's participation in politics. Unfortunately, in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in Nigeria, women's participation in politics has been very low (Jaiyeola & Adeyeye, 2021). Existing facts have clearly shown the decline in the number of women in politics in recent times. This is contrary to global and African recommendations for the inclusion of women in elective and appointive positions.

Igbolekwu, Chisaa Onyekachi, et al. (2023), in their article on Women Supporting Women: A Glass Ceiling for Women Politicians in Ibadan, Nigeria, argued that “negative stereotypes against women politicians were also found to be among the major impediments to their victory at the polls.” These scholars are of the view that women are still left behind or subjugated in the political terrain because of the opinion of people, especially women, that women may be exposed to the danger of political violence, which is an integral part of Nigerian politics, if supported. According to Adabembe (2022), Nigerian politicians are known for nefarious acts, which include, but are not limited to, embezzlement of public funds, proliferation of firearms, and abuse of power and office. Consequently, all these factors have impeded the nation's development. National development, in the opinion of Adabembe (2022), encompasses comprehensive progress in all aspects of a nation's socio-economic, political, educational, and economic spheres, ultimately benefiting all citizens. Meanwhile, recent developments in Nigeria have clearly shown that women are still subjugated and oppressed in leadership positions, especially in the political sphere, which has impacted the growth and development of the nation. Unfortunately, scholars' efforts to expose and mitigate inequality in political spheres have not yielded the desired results.

Thus, gender-based violence, sexual harassment, assaults, female genital mutilation, and deprivation of rights and freedom of women and girls in some communities across Nigerian states are still very prevalent. Thus, Ciroma (2006), as cited in Adedayo et al. (2022), enumerates several factors that hinder women's participation in national development. He affirms that sexual stereotyping of social roles, customs, traditions, and cultural prejudice is responsible for women's subjugation. Gender inequality in the workplace, as argued by Adedayo and Ojo (2021), constitutes an internal and external violent conflict that profoundly affects the social, economic, and political conditions of the entire populace. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) affirmed that women are still much more likely than men to be poor and illiterate and have less access to property ownership, credit, training, and employment. They are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely to be victims of domestic violence. This is despite many international agreements affirming their human rights.

Muhammad (2006) believes that the global crusade for gender equality is a strategy for reducing poverty levels among women and men, which can enhance the efficiency of public investments in improving health and the standard of living. Adedayo et al. (2022) view the Northern region of Nigeria as exhibiting a treatment towards women similar to that of third-world countries, as gender equality has been a significant challenge in the region. Meanwhile, some states in the southern region equally exhibit this tendency with a high degree of intensity, where women and girls' children are nothing to their ethnic and cultural practices.

However, their existing cases of injustice and inequality persist in the face of gender equality practices worldwide. More than 90% of countries accorded women two key democratic rights at the beginning of the twenty-first century: the right to vote and the ability to run for public office in elections. Although this should have improved women's participation in politics globally, the impact of these rights has still been low, especially in developing countries (Broockman, 2014). Women's representation and participation in Nigerian politics remain low compared to other nations (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2020). This is even though women comprise almost half of the world's population (Ritchie & Roser, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

This article was theoretically inspired and informed by Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy, developed in (1990), which she later named Gender Regime (Haralampos & Holborn, 2013). Still, I prefer the former for this work. According to her, patriarchy is crucial for the study of gender inequalities; in her work “Theorizing Patriarchy,” Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as a “system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women” this scholar highlights six patriarchal structures that assisted in maintaining male domination in all spheres of life. These patriarchal structures are the state, paid work, patriarchal relationships with households, patriarchal culture, sexuality, and male violence toward women (Walby, 1990). Meanwhile, three of Walby's patriarchal structures will be adapted to this research: paid employment, culture, and the

state. These three patriarchal structures selected provide the base for the consideration of the possible relationship that exists between women's subjugation and patriarchal structures.

However, some scholars, such as Stacey (1993) and Pollert (1996), criticised Walby's concept of patriarchal structure. They argued that some structures are more clearly conceptualised than others. These scholars say that Walby fails to explain how people negotiate such a system. Stacey believes that attention should be paid to the subjective states of women and how they come to terms with or resist oppression. Regardless, the patriarchy theory is relevant to this study. Thus, this study drew inferences from the theory of patriarchy as the suppositions of the theory seemed to explain the reasons for women's subjugation and harassment of women politicians in elective and appointive positions in Nigeria's political sphere.

The implication of Walby's theory of "Theorising Patriarchy" within this study is that paid employment is one of the key structures that disadvantaged women in the 20th century. In Nigerian politics, men continue to dominate the political landscape. For instance, the Senate has 109 seats, with only four women serving as Senators. Unfortunately, one of the four women, Senator Natasha, was humiliated for trying to challenge the status quo of sexual harassment by Senate president Senator Akpabio, the number three man in Nigeria, and this led to her suspension. Thus, Nigerian women can be said to be far behind men in both elective and appointive positions because of the lack of opportunities enjoyed by their male counterparts. Equally, Nigerian women in politics are facing untold humiliation, subjugation, sexual harassment and other forms of harassment.

The harassment of women in politics is both verbal and sexual. For example, on July 19, 2024, the Senate president verbally abused Natasha, saying that the Senate chamber is not a nightclub, after she spoke on a motion without permission from the Senate president. Although he later apologised after he was widely criticised as dismissive and sexist (Sahara reporters, 2025). At the same time, there have been cases of sitting issues in the Nigerian Senate over the years. For instance, Senator Akapabio and Senate President Bukola Saraki had a change in seating arrangements in the eighth assembly when Akapabio protested his assigned position, causing rancour in the assembly. It is worth noting that he was not suspended for this. Moreover, such a sitting issue had occurred earlier in this assembly, precisely in April 2024, which led to rancour between the Senate leader, Michael Bamidele Opeyemi, representing Ekiti Central, and one Senator Sahabi Ya'u, APC, representing Zamfara North, with no punishment being meted out to him.

Furthermore, culture is one of the patriarchal structures identified by Walby. The implication of culture as a structural element in women's subjugation is that Nigerian culture believes that women are to be seen and not to be heard; thus, any woman who is doing otherwise is considered to be rebellious. Walby argues that women were deemed feminine if they acted in a particular way, such as dogmatically obeying men's commands, confinement to the domestic sphere, and being sexually attracted to men. The former president of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari's statement concerning the former first lady Aisha can justify Walby's assertion. The president was quoted as saying: "I do not know which party my wife belongs to, but my wife belongs to my kitchen, my living room, and the other room" (BBC, 2016). Equally, the Senate president of Nigeria, Akpabio, was quoted as saying, "Senator Natasha's action can frighten men from appointing or selecting women as deputy governors in the future." Ojediran (2025), therefore, affirmed that the statement of Akapabio is a sexist and misogynistic comment. Thus, these statements by the number one and three citizens reveal the mentality of Nigerian men regarding women's societal roles. The invisible ceiling for women in Nigerian politics is attributed to a confluence of socio-cultural practices and religious beliefs.

The third structural element of Walby's patriarchy theory, "The State", is relevant to this study. She argues that, although state policies are no longer directed at confining women to private spheres, such as the home and kitchen, there has still been little genuine attempt to improve women's position in the public sphere, and equal opportunities in the legislature are rarely enforced. According to her, the change in the structure of patriarchy from private in the 19th century to public in the 20th and 21st centuries is because contemporary women have access to both public and private places; this notwithstanding, they are subordinated within them. Nigeria's political arena is the dominant structure of patriarchy, where women are no longer exploited so much by individual patriarchs but are exploited collectively by men in the political arena. This stark injustice needs to be addressed. As cited in Hralambos & Holborn (2013), Walby argued that "women are no longer restricted to the domestic hearth, but have the whole society in which to roam and be exploited."

The Woman: Nathasa Hadisa Akpoti

Natasha Hadisa Akpoti was born on December 9, 1979, to a Nigerian father and a Ukrainian mother. Her primary education was at Christ the King School, Okene, Kogi State, and she attended Government Girls Unity Secondary School in Oboroke, Kogi State, for her Junior Secondary School Education. She later proceeded to Federal Government College, Idoani, in Ondo State, where she graduated in 1997. She later gained admission to the University of Abuja, where she earned her bachelor's degree in law in 2004. She attended the Nigerian Law School in Abuja and was called to the Bar by the Nigerian body of Benchers on November 8, 2005 (Arongbonlo, 2023). She obtained her Master of Laws degree in oil and gas management from the University of Dundee in 2012. She is married to Emmanuel Uduagan on March 5, 2022. (Oloniran, 2022)

Natasha Hadisa Akpoti is a Nigerian politician, Lawyer, and social entrepreneur, founder of the Builders Hub Impact Investment Programme and the Builders Hub Foundation. Natasha is a reformer and social entrepreneur, and she also serves as the CEO of the LegendArk group. She applied for the INSEAD Social Entrepreneurship programme in Singapore, where she acquired innovative, smart, and sustainable solutions for tackling neglected problems at all levels of society. As a reformer, she exposed corruption at the moribund Ajaokuta Steel Mill and pushed for the revival of Nigeria's foremost steel mill. An advocate for women's empowerment, industrial development and social justice.

Natasha Akpoti Uduagan began her political career in 2019 when she contested for the Kogi state Central Senatorial District under the Social Democratic Party (SDP) but lost. Later that year, she ran for the governorship of Kogi State but was disqualified by the Independent National Electoral

Commission (INEC). Natasha has been a formidable force in Kogi State politics since 2019. She defies all odds in a male-dominated society. She faced strong opposition from established political structures. In an interview with the BBC pidgin in 2019, she confirmed how humiliated she was when she was bullied out of a Kogi State stakeholders meeting, and her assailants burned down her part secretariat. In her words: "I feel very bad oo, I feel humiliated, I swear to God" (BBC Pidgin, 2019).

Furthermore, during the 2023 election, the five roads leading to Natasha Akpoti's hometown were destroyed by Governor Yahaya Bello. This was done in an attempt to prevent INEC officials from reaching the area and to hinder movement to the election venue. The town was completely cut off from the rest of Kogi State, in her words: the governor thwarts road construction. The governor, a day before the election, cut five roads. He also dug gullies on five roads leading to some town villages and local governments in Senator Natasha's constituents. That was to prevent the election from taking place, probably endangering my life" (BBC Pidgin, 2019). Not only was the governor cut off roads, she was quoted to have said during her appearance on Channel Television Programme "Politics Today". "I heard guns, I had henchmen, shoot at my vehicle; I have video evidence of that." Despite all these challenges and threats, Natasha remained steadfast. She believed it was crucial to show her unwavering commitment to serve as an inspirational example for women in politics and those aspiring to pursue leadership roles in the political sphere. Although she lost the election, the election tribunal overturned the results in November 2023, and she became one of Nigeria's youngest Senators.

Fortunately, her legislative efforts have made a significant contribution to the nation's development and the well-being of her constituents in the areas of security, industrialisation, and social welfare. She has contributed to the floor of the House on issues affecting her constituents, particularly in the areas of healthcare, education, and job creation. (The Nation) In her one year in office, she empowered people from her constituents. She marked her first year in office by empowering her constituents in several ways. Her people attested to the fact that she is a humanitarian who has attended to their needs by digitalising education in her constituency. She equally renovated some dilapidated schools and built new ones. She has promoted many bills that have helped improve the lives of her people.

Natasha's present political challenges

Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduagan, one of the senators in the Nigerian 10th Senate, has been characterised by party rivalry, political tension, humiliation, and legal battles. A very outspoken, brilliant, and beautiful senator is presently in a row with the Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, a powerful and number three man in the country, who is equally from the All Progressive Congress (APC) the ruling party who refused to accept any motion from Senator Akpoti-Uduagan Natasha until she is moved to the newly allocated seat. Senator Akpoti-Uduagan Natasha rejected the new seat because she felt undermined and disrespected (Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi, 2025) and insisted on maintaining her old seat. This led to her suspension on March 6, 2025. Her suspension was based on insubordination and rudeness, which go against the house rules. The rule she was accused of violating requires a senator to speak on the floor of the House only from their designated seat. The senator, therefore, accused the Senate President of persecuting her. She believed that the senate president was indifferent to her because she had earlier rejected his sexual advances. Senator Natasha made a petition of sexual harassment against the Senate president. Subsequently, she was suspended for six months with all her benefits as a senator, and those of her aids stopped. The question now is what facilitates all these behaviours? Her behaviour on the floor of the house can be argued to be exhibited because of the alleged sexual harassment by the Senate president.

In her reaction to the suspension Senator Natasha Akpoti- Uduagan said, " this injustice will not be sustained " she equally wrote " Against the culture of silence, intimidation and victim –shaming; my unjust suspension from the Nigerian senate invalidates the principles of natural justice, fairness and equity" (Senator Natasha Akpoti- Uduagan, 2025). She was quoted on BBC News as saying, " I am being victimised. My suspension is a way to silence me" Unfortunately, amidst the ongoing controversies surrounding her suspension, female legislative aids of the 10th senate have publicly expressed their appreciation for Akpabio's leadership, describing him as gender-friendly, inclusive and fair. Some senators, both present and past, have shared their views on the issue. For example, Senator Ireti Kinigbe, the Senator representing the Federal Capital Territory and chairperson of the Senate Committee on Women Affairs, faulted Natasha and accused her of making a big deal out of seating arrangements. (Punch, 14th March, 2025). However, she seemed to have retraced her steps by vowing to champion the sexual harassment allegation raised by the lawmaker.

Equally, Senator Florence Ita-Giwa was quoted as saying, "If you are a Senator as a woman, no one can harass you". More so, that the former senator olujimi Abiodun a former Minority leader in her defence of the senate president said " I took over from God's will Akpabio as Minority Leader, so I know him and his wife quite well. He Akpabio jokes a lot. He is fond of making fun out of everything." (Premium times, 2025). It is pertinent to note that this is not the first incident of sexual allegation against the senate president, the former acting managing director of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Joy Nunieh, had said she slapped Godswill Akpabio for sexually harassing her. (The Cable, 2025) . Akpabio was the minister of Niger Delta when this issue of sexual harassment happened.

Although this is not the first instance of rancour in both the National Assembly and the Senate, in 2007, members of the National Assembly were throwing punches and chairs at each other, which was reported by all national dailies at the time. In 2016, a physical fracas also occurred between the then-Nigerian first lady, Senator Oluremi Tinubu, who represented Lagos, and Senator Dino Melaye, who represented Kogi West. Dino Melaye threatened Senator Remi Tinubu, who was then the wife of the National Leader of the APC. Senator Dino Melaye was quoted as saying, " I will beat you, impregnate you, nothing will happen"(nairaland, 2016). Furthermore, the recent issue of the sitting position has also caused a rowdy session in the present Senate, when Senator Sahabi Ya'u, APC Zamfara North, complained about the seat allocated to him by Senator Michael Opeyemi Bamidele, the Senate leader. It was reported that his complaints were made in a hushed tone, and the situation escalated into a shouting match between the two. (Leadership, 2024). Despite all the above incidents, there was no occasion on which any of the senators involved were suspended or punished for their

actions. Then one will be forced to ask: why is the case of Senator Nathasa Akpoti different? Why was she suspended? Why was she not given a fair hearing before the suspension? The answer to these questions is not far-fetched; patriarchal power is at play in this issue. It can be argued that she was being punished for daring to question the status quo of sexualising a woman and trying to challenge the third most powerful man in Nigeria. A country where women are mostly seen as objects in the kitchen, who should be seen and not heard.

Deducible Facts from Natasha's Experience

- a. Societal norms are still an obstruction to women's rights in Nigeria. Bias in political spheres aimed at discouraging women's inclusion and political participation
- b. Double standards are employed in dealing with male and female politicians
- c. The 'divide and rule' method is being employed by male politicians against women politicians.
- d. Nigerian women still have a long way to go in order to secure their rightful places and positions in elective and appointive positions.

Position of women in Nigerian politics since 1999 till now

Table: Women's Representation in the Senate and the House of Representatives

SENATE				HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES			
ELECTION DATES	SEATS	NUMBER OF WOMEN	%	ELECTION DATES	SEATS	NUMBER OF WOMEN	%
April (1999).	109	3	3.4	April,1999	360	12	2.8
April,2003	109	3	4.9	April,2003	360	21	2.8
April,2007	109	9	7.0	April,2007	360	25	8.3
April,2011	109	7	6.8	April,2011	360	24	6.4
March,2015	109	7	5.6	March,2015	360	24	6.5
March,2019	109	7	3.0	March,2019	360	22	6.5
March, 2023	109	4	2.7	March, 2023	360	17	4.7

Adapted from Adedayo et.al, 2022

The above table is a symbol of how women are marginalised in Nigeria's political spheres. Unfortunately, the small number of women amid multitudes of men are still humiliated, sexualised, marginalised, stereotyped and excluded from important discussions or have their voices ignored.

However, there are seven female deputy Governors out of the 36 deputy positions in this political dispensation, while the 36 states, including the FCT, have men as governors. Governorship position can be said to be exclusively reserved for men in the country this can be supported with the words of Senate president who said "Senator Natasha's actions can frighten men from appointing or selecting women as deputy in the future" the question then is who tells the senate president Godswill Akpabio that only men should be presidents, Governors, senators, House of Representatives and women should not? Ojediran (2025) argues that the statement of the Senate president is sexist and reinforces harmful stereotypes about women's roles in leadership.

Conclusion

This study analysed the humiliation, subjugation and discrimination women in Nigerian politics are facing using Senator Natasa Akpoti Udiagan as an example of how few Nigerian women in politics are being treated due to the patriarchal structure of African society and the nation. The study, which banks on the assumption of Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy, which views women as objects to be seen and not heard. It was discovered that Senator Natasa Akpoti's Udiagan efforts to question the status quo of sexualising, subjugating and discriminating against women in Nigeria have led to her present predicament. Although as at the time of this article, she is still on suspension and on many court cases with the Federal Government of Nigeria and the senate president Godswill Akapabio. The study, which builds on the assumptions of Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy, explores how men's domination and the patriarchal structure of Nigerian politics have led to the oppression and exploitation of women in politics. The study recommends a comprehensive overhaul of Nigeria's political structure, adopting a gender-balanced approach that provides equal treatment and opportunities for all.

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