

Women's Political Rights and Electronic Voting: the Perspective of Nigerian Women and the Law

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Received 3 November 2023 | Accepted 3 December 2024 |
Published online 16 April 2025

Abstract

The Beijing Fourth International Conference on women appropriately sets a standard of 30% of women in elective and appointive positions (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995). The National Gender Policy (NGP) of Nigeria advocates 35% affirmative action for more inclusive representation of women in elective and

appointive positions. Additionally, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria makes provisions for women's political rights. Other international legal instruments also protect and promote Nigerian women's political rights. However, underrepresentation of women in Nigerian politics remains an issue, due to low participation, even though they have been enfranchised. Thus, this study examines the reasons for the low level of participation of women in Nigerian politics. A socio-legal research methodology was used to gain empirical evidence on the research questions raised. Specifically, the study argues that a number of women do not participate in politics because of the traditional paper ballot electoral system adopted by Nigeria, that if the manual system is substituted for an electronic one, more women are likely to participate in Nigerian politics. Premised on that, the study recommends that the Nigerian Government adopt the electronic voting system to enhance women participation in politics. The study concludes that a legal framework for viable electronic voting is highly needed.

Keywords

paper ballot system – electronic voting – Nigerian women – political participation – underrepresentation

1 Introduction: Global Overview of Women and Voting Rights

Before the 18th century, women did not have suffrage.¹ The right for women to vote in elections is known as women's suffrage. Some individuals began pushing for changes to the voting laws to allow women to vote at the beginning of the 18th century.² National and international organisations, particularly the International Woman Suffrage Alliance were established to coordinate efforts to enfranchise women (founded in 1904 in Berlin, Germany).³ In 1776, New Jersey became the first place in the world to grant and preserve women's suffrage (though in 1807, this was reverted so that only white men could vote).⁴ Pitcairn Islands was the first province to continually allow women to vote in 1838.⁵ Norway was the first

1 Women's Suffrage: Fact Sheet <<https://crsreports.congress.gov/>> accessed on 21 February 2023.

2 The Woman's Vote – A Chronology <<https://www.fawco.org/>> accessed on 27 February 2023.

3 Sneider Allison, "The New Suffrage History: Voting Rights in International Perspective" *History Compass* [2010] 8(7).

4 The Washington Post <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/>> accessed on 21 February 2023.

5 *ibid.*