

**EXAMINING THE BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN FORMAL
PEACE AND SECURITY PROCESSES IN NIGERIA: TOWARDS A GENDER-
BASED APPROACH**

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Abstract

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was passed in October 2000 to advocate for women inclusion in peace and security processes. Since then, other several resolutions have been adopted, which are collectively referred to as the Women, Peace and Security Framework. In order to domesticate this framework, many countries, including Nigeria has developed Nation Action Plans. However, despite these efforts, women's participation in formal peace and security processes remains significantly limited. This paper, therefore, examines the barriers to women's active participation in peace and security processes in Nigeria. The paper adopts the liberal feminist theory as its theoretical framework. It employs a qualitative research approach, with relevant data sourced from secondary sources, such as journals, textbooks and reports. The descriptive method was used to analyse the data. The findings reveal several barriers to women's participation, including cultural and traditional norms, low levels of education, political underrepresentation, gender-based violence, limited financial resources and low self-esteem. To address these challenges, the paper recommends tackling societal norms, enhancing education and capacity building, and combating gender based violence. It also emphasizes the need for united and coordinated women's efforts, strong political will, and effective implementation of enabling legislations and policies to strengthen women's participation in peace and security processes.

Keywords: women, peace, security, gender, Nigeria

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Introduction

Conflict is inevitable in all aspects of human life, manifesting in various forms across the globe. In Nigeria, several ongoing conflicts and security challenges seriously affect the population, with women bearing a disproportionate burden of the consequences. Research shows that armed conflict has taken a significant toll on women's and girls' health and safety (Svallfors et al., 2024). In conflict-affected areas, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence (GBV), loss of loved ones, loss of livelihoods and displacement (Agbalajobi, 2022; Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2019). As of 2022, Nigeria's population was estimated at 216,783,381, with women constituting approximately 50% of the total population (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024:2). However, despite making up half of the population and being among the most affected during conflicts, women participation in formal peace and security initiatives remain significantly limited.

Recognizing the severe impact of armed conflict on civilians, particularly women who are increasingly targeted by

combatants and make up the majority of those affected as refugees and internally displaced persons, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security in October 2000. This resolution highlights the essential role of women in conflict prevention, resolution, and peace building, stressing the need for their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security. It also calls for their inclusion in decision-making at all levels of conflict prevention and resolution. Subsequent resolutions have also been adopted in this regard, all of which are collectively known as the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

Over the past 20 years, there has been progress globally in the implementation of Resolution 1325. To implement the resolution at the national level, 108 United Nations Members states (56%) have adopted National Action Plans (NAP). Out of these, 56 countries have developed one NAP on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), 27 have developed two, 15 have developed three, 6 countries

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are on their fourth, and two countries are on their fifth NAPs (Women's International League of Peace and Freedom, [WILPF], n.d.). These documents outline objectives and activities that countries take to secure the human rights of women and girls in conflict settings, prevent armed conflict and violence against women and girls, and ensure the meaningful participation of women in peace and security. Nigeria is among the United Nations Member States that have developed NAPs on WPS. The country launched its first NAP in 2013 for the period 2013-2017, followed by a second National Action Plan in 2017 for the period 2017-2020 (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2017), and the government has since initiated a third National Action Plan (Mercy Corps, 2024). In pursuit of the same objectives, 14 of the Nigeria's 36 states have so far implemented State Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security (UN Women, 2022).

Studies have shown that women play a crucial role in the peace and security processes, offering unique perspectives

and approaches that are essential for sustainable peace. Their involvement in peace initiatives has been shown to contribute significantly to the prevention and resolution of conflicts (Krause et al., 2018; O'Reilly, 2015). In Nigeria, women have demonstrated their ability to mediate disputes, support reconciliation efforts, and rebuild communities torn apart by violence (Musa, 2024). However, despite numerous legal frameworks and efforts to enhance women's participation in peace and security processes in Nigeria, their involvement remains limited. The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWS, 2023) which tracks sustainable peace through 'inclusion, justice, and security' for women ranks Nigeria 162 out of 177 countries on its Women, Peace and Security Index. This exclusion of women not only undermines the effectiveness of peace and security efforts but also perpetuates gender inequality and limits the potential for achieving comprehensive and lasting peace in Nigeria. Therefore, understanding the barriers that prevent women from fully participating in peace

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and security processes is critical. This paper aims to examine these barriers and suggest way forward to enhance their participation in peace and security initiatives in Nigeria.

Literature Review

The concept of peace has evolved significantly over time, and several scholars have offered different definition of what the term entails. According to Galtung (1996:2), the founder of peace studies and peace research, peace is conceptualised in two dimensions, negative peace and positive peace. To Galtung, negative peace “is the absence of violence, absence of war”. It is a condition in which no active organized military violence is taking place (Barash & Webel, nd), while positive peace “is the integration of human society”. Positive peace is characterized by the presence of social justice and harmonious relationships that prevents structural violence. This definition suggests that peace is not only absence of war or conflict, but also involves creating equitable and just conditions that bring about harmony in the society. Boulding (1978: 13), emphasized on the concept of

stable peace, arguing that it is a situation which exists when the probability of war is so minimal that it no longer focus on the calculations of the people involved.

Because peace has been difficult to define due to its multifaceted nature, the simplest way to approach it is in terms of the harmony achieved by absence of violence or the fear of violence, which has been described as Negative Peace (IEP, 2024). The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), has made an effort to measure global peacefulness. The IEP Global Peace Index ranks 163 independent states and territories based on their level of peacefulness. The GPI used 23 indicators across three domains, “the level of societal safety and security, the extent of on-going domestic and international conflict; and the degree of militarisation.” On the 2024 index, Iceland ranks the most peaceful country in the world, a position it has held since 2008. It is joined at the top of the Index by Ireland, Austria, New Zealand and Singapore. On the other hand, Yemen ranked the least peaceful country in the world, followed by Sudan, South Sudan, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. Nigeria is

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ranked 147th out of 163 countries, with a score of 2.907. This low ranking reflects the various internal countries and security challenges faced by the country, particularly on going issues like the Boko Haram insurgency, communal clashes, farmers-herder's clashes, banditry and kidnapping.

The concept of security has also expanded over time. The term security has traditionally been defined to mean immunity of a state or nation to threats emanating from outside its boundaries (Ayoob, 1983). Traditional security issues focus on the threats against the essential values of the state, territorial integrity, and political sovereignty. Means, which are also important in defining traditional security, consist of weapons, armaments systems, and the military, but diplomatic means like pacts and alliances aimed at building special relations between states for security purposes are also means of traditional security (Attinà, 2016). However, the focus has been broadened, introducing the idea that security involves multiple dimensions, including military, environmental, societal, political and economic threats (Hoffman et al., 2016).

Buzan (1991) argued that security is about more than military defence; it is about safeguarding individuals and communities from various forms of harm and ensuring that states manage risks across different sectors. This is what brought about the recent concept of human security, which shift the focus of security from states to individuals.

The role of women in peace and security has gained significant recognition in academic discourse. Since the adoption of United Nations Resolution 1325, which lays emphasis on the importance of women's participation in peace building and conflict resolution studies have found that women inclusion in peace processes significantly increases the chances of sustainable peace (Adjei, 2019). According to O'Reilly (2015), women inclusion in peace negotiations often leads to more durable agreements. Their study found that when women are included in peace processes, the resulting agreement are 35% more likely to last at least 15years. According to Gillis (2017), women play diverse roles in peace, security, conflict, and disarmament. As civilians, they suffer the harsh impacts of

conflict. As mothers and caregivers, they often lead households under difficult conditions. As breadwinners, some engage in illicit arms trade, while as soldiers, they serve in various capacities, from combatants to cooks. In politics, they influence laws and policies on security, and as activists, they advocate for peace and increased security. Thus, based on their diverse experiences, they can offer valuable insights and make important contributions in decision making processes about peace and security.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the liberal feminist theory as its theoretical framework. Feminism is a mass movement commenced by women of all groups to eradicate all forms of feminist oppressions by men that are prevailing in a patriarchal society. It fights against all types of oppressions on women and also tries to explain the phenomenon of gender inequality (Mohajan, 2022, cited in Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 2023). The liberal feminist approach emerged during the 17th and 18th centuries (Cottais, 2020). The theory was influenced by social

changes, revolutions, and capitalism. At its core, liberalism emphasizes key principles such as individual freedom, democracy, equal opportunities, and equal rights (Guy-Evans, 2024). According to this perspective, women should enjoy the same legal and social rights as men. The theory believes that discrimination and gender inequality which result from out-dated laws, policies, and social norms, should be reformed.

According to this theory, increasing women's access to education, employment, and political participation is key to achieving gender equality. Early proponents of liberal feminism, such as Wollstonecraft (1792) and Mill (1869), underscored these concerns. Wollstonecraft (1792) argued that women must receive equal education to develop into moral and autonomous human beings. Similarly, Mill (1869) highlighted systemic barriers restricting women's ability and advocate for their civic and legal equality, including voting rights. These arguments suggest the need for institutional reforms to dismantle gender-based inequalities and promote an

inclusive society. This theory is particularly relevant to this paper as it provides a framework for understanding the barriers to women participation in peace and security processes. In many societies, including Nigeria, women continue to face legal, social and political challenges that limits their involvement in decision making roles, especially in peace and security sectors. This theory therefore enables a deeper examination of the institutional and societal changes needed to enhance women's participation in peace and security initiatives.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, which is suitable for exploring and understanding the meanings individuals of groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Cresswell, 2009). The data for this research were obtained from secondary sources. Secondary data are information that has been collected and documented by others (Kothari, 2004:111; Kumar, 2011:347). Using secondary data allows researchers to build upon established knowledge, reduce time and cost, and provide access to broader range of data. For this study, data

were collected from credible and reliable peer-reviewed journals, textbooks, and reports to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The sources were selected based on their relevance to the current research, and they were critically evaluated to ensure validity and reliability. The descriptive method was employed to analyse the data, providing a clear and systematic interpretation of the findings.

Results and Discussions

Women's Participation in Peace and Security Processes in Nigeria

In recent years, Nigeria has faced unprecedented security challenges ranging from Boko Haram terrorist attacks, militancy, armed robbery, banditry, kidnapping for ransom, herders'/farmers' clashes and cultism, among other social vices (Okoro, 2023). These challenges have far-reaching consequences, affecting political, economic, and social spheres, and leaving communities in a constant state of fear and uncertainty (Ibrahim, 2023). As the crisis deepens, there is a growing consensus that resolving these complex national security problems requires the

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involvement of everyone in the society (Akpan, 2023). Having recognized the scale of the problem, stakeholders across various sectors are increasingly advocating for an inclusive approach to peace and security processes, noting that gender inclusivity is not just a matter of equity and equality, but a strategic imperative for national security (Amuwa, 2024).

Therefore, it has become clear that no single group or institution can effectively address the multifaceted nature of Nigeria's security challenges alone. As a result, the exclusion of women, who represent a significant portion of the population, from peace building and security efforts, is not only unjust but counterproductive. Women, often at the grassroots level offer valuable insights into the social dynamics of conflict and peace. They have demonstrated their ability to bring communities together, promote dialogue, and address the roots causes of conflicts. Their unique perspectives and experiences offer valuable insights into conflict prevention and resolution (Africa Union, 2023).

Table 1: Channels for Women's Participation in Peace and Security Processes in Nigeria

Formal	Semiformal	Informal
Security Sector	Networks and Coalitions	Individual Advocates and Ad Hoc Activism
Commissions /Panels of Inquiry	Social Organizations	Wives/Mothers of High Profile Political/Traditional Leaders
Civil Society Organizations	Traditional and Cultural Organizations	Community Development Associations
Political Leadership		

Source: UN Women Nigeria (2021).

Table 1 illustrates the ways in which women contribute to peace building in Nigeria. Women participate in formal peace and security processes through established institutions such as the military, police, and other security government agencies. However, their representation in these formal roles

remains minimal. For instance, a gender assessment conducted by Partners West Africa Nigeria (PWAN, 2020) across three key Nigerian security institutions, including the Nigeria Police Force, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, and the Nigeria Army within the Federal Capital Territory, Bauchi and Benue states revealed low representation of women in the security sector. The report highlights that women are significantly underrepresented both in terms of size and rank, with very few women holding important management, strategic, and decision-making positions. This imbalance according to the report begins at the recruitment stage, where the intake of women is minimal, and consequently, their numbers dwindle further.

Table 2: See Appendix 1

Table 2 presents the gender statistics of the Nigeria Police Force in 2022. The data reveals that out of a total 122,869 officers, 114,197 (93%) are men, while only 8,672 (7%) are women. This imbalance is evident across different ranks, with 92% of senior police officers

and 93% of inspectors being male. Similarly, in the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps, women in the Superintendent cadre constituted 30.31%, while men accounted for 69.9%. In the Inspectorate cadre, female representation stood at 28.67%, whereas their male counterparts made up 71.33%. The Assistant cadre showed the widest gap, with women comprising only 17.51%, while men dominated with 82.49% (NBS, 2024: 60). This buttress the fact that women representation in the security sector is minimal.

Women can also participate in commissions to investigate and respond to security crises, conflict resolution or human rights violations. Women-led civil society organizations in Nigeria have contributed to achieving women's inclusion and gender equality in politics and society through their participation in countering violent extremism activities (Nwangwu, & Ezeibe, 2019). In terms of political leadership, women in elected or appointed position can also influence security policies and decisions at the highest level. However, existing data also shows that the political representation of

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women in Nigeria is low. Okafor and Ileyemi (2023) asserts that from 1999 till date, only 157 women have been elected into the 469-member National Assembly (38 Senators and 119 members of the House of Representatives), compared to 2,657 men (616 Senators, 2,041 members of the House of Representatives) during the same period. The consequence of this underrepresentation in formal mechanisms is that decision and policies regarding security are often made without the perspectives or voices of women. This lack of female input hinders the development of more inclusive and gender-sensitive security policies, ultimately limiting the effectiveness of security provisioning in the country (Famoofo, 2023; PWAN, 2020).

However, despite being largely excluded from formal processes, they actively participate in semi-formal and informal peace processes where they play significant roles and employ a variety of non-violent tactics to maintain social stability, foster peaceful coexistence, and restore harmonious relationships. Among the Igbos of Nigeria, women had economic power to the extent of getting

married and having children of their own. In Hausa's history, Queen Amina is remembered for leading many successful military expeditions to defend, expand and consolidate Zaria as the strongest Hausa state in the 16th century. Also among the Yorubas, Moremi of Ile-Ife's patriotism led to the sacrifice of her son to ensure that the town is victorious in battle. Madam Tinubu's memory is that of a fearless woman who fought in resistance to colonialism, and is still highly respected by many. Mrs Funmilayo Ransome Kuti will continue to be remembered for campaigning against the imposition of tax on the Egba women of her culture. As noted by Famoofo (2023), in situations where women are routinely silenced and rendered invisible in the formal, public spheres, their involvement in peacebuilding often manifests through informal networks and organizations where they work to address and resolve conflicts amicably. Individual advocates and activists, like Obi Ezekwesili, Aisha Yesufu has led peaceful protests and movement like the #BringBackOurGirls,

demanding the safe return of schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram.

Women also play critical roles as wives of political leaders and heads of security agencies. For instance, the wives of the President and Governors often engage in advocacy, social development programs, and policy influence. Similarly, the wives of heads of security agencies form associations such as Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Association (Nigerian Army), Naval Officers Wives Association (Nigerian Navy), Nigeria Airforce Officers Wives Association (Nigerian Air Force), and Police Officers' Wives Association (Nigerian Police) to support the welfare of officers and their families. These groups contribute to community development, conflict resolution, and humanitarian efforts.

Factors Affecting Women's Participation in Formal Peace and Security Processes in Nigeria

The meaningful engagement of women in peace processes is hampered by a number of factors. These include:

Cultural and Traditional Barriers

Cultural and traditional practices significantly hinder women's participation in peace and security processes in Nigeria. Deeply rooted patriarchal norms often limit women's roles to the domestic spheres, limiting their visibility and influence in the decision-making in the society. According to Adepoju et al. (2021), negative cultural practices, especially masculinity and power distance values deter women from actively participating and making their voices heard in peace building processes. Yinusa (1990) argues that cultural values, often backed up by religious injunctions, uphold the invisibility of women in the public domain. Such societal norms make women to believe that the optimum type of social interaction for their wellbeing and the welfare of their societies is to be subordinate to men.

This cultural expectation frames women as socially, emotionally, and even economically dependent on men assigning them roles such as caregiving, homemaking and child-rearing rather than allowing them pursue their passion to contribute to socio-economic development. According to David (2021),

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this social indoctrination has made women follow social norms at all times, even when doing so puts them in danger, as seen in early marriages, domestic violence that takes the form of sexual abuse and exploitation, denial of access to education, and other harmful practices. As UN Women Nigeria (2021) reports, these factors have led to imbalances in job and employment opportunities for women and girls, making them largely underpaid, exploited, and subjected to harmful work practices and discrimination, all of which significantly exacerbate their inability to fully engage in peace building, decision-making and leadership positions.

Low Level of Education

Education is the most important contributory factor to the participation of Nigerian women in the modern sector, including peace building and security. It gives women the opportunity to be professionals in various fields of human endeavour, thus contributing their own quota to national development. However, as Nduwimana (n.d., p.54) notes, a vast majority of those who do not go to school or are illiterate are women and girls. This

lack of access to education significantly affects women's participation in the formal sector (Ahmad & Tank, 2020; Makama, 2013). According to the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (2022), approximately 18.5 million children in Nigeria, the majority of whom are girls (60%) do not have access to education. Furthermore, the percentage of female enrolments in adult/basic literacy education was 40.55% in 2020, 46.10% in 2021, and 38.32% in 2022. During the same period, male enrolments consistently exceeded female enrolments, accounting for 59.45% in 2020, 53.90% and 61.68% respectively (NBS, 2024:22).

The lack of formal education for girls is caused by various factors, including socio-cultural norms and economic barriers that discourage formal education attendance. Additionally, widespread attacks on schools in Nigeria have worsened the situation by making the learning environment unsafe and discouraging parents and caregivers from sending their wards, especially girls to schools. Due to low levels of education, many women lack the training necessary for effective involvement in advocacy,

public awareness campaigns and leadership roles. Their ability to peace efforts is further constrained by low self-esteem, poor competences and lack of confidence to express their powerful voice in decision-making processes (UN Women Nigeria, 2021).

Low Political Representation

Nigeria has one of the lowest rates of women's participation in political leadership and decision making. According to the World Economic Forum (2024:12), Nigeria ranks 125th out of 146 countries on the Global Gender Gap index. Notably, in the political empowerment sub index, the country ranks 136th of 146 countries. This low ranking reflects the persistent underrepresentation of women in Nigeria's political landscape. In Nigerian 10th National Assembly, women occupy only 4 out of the 109 seats in the Senate, accounting for just 2.7%, and 17 out of 360 seats in the House of Representatives representing 4.7% (Alao, 2025).

Despite making up nearly half of Nigeria's population, women are minimally included in decision-making,

which hinders the development of inclusive policies that address gender-specific needs and contribute to sustainable peace. Garba (2016) asserts that women have historically been underrepresented in peace and security processes, particularly where important policy decisions and resource allocations are made. Unless women are actively involved in leadership and decision making, progress on implementing the women, peace and security agenda will continue to be limited. Maianhi (2023) notes that achieving gender equality and having women in decision-making positions in peace and security development ensures that women are protected from sexual and gender-based violence by making sure the voices, needs and priorities of women and girls are incorporated in all areas of peace-building.

Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is another impediment to women involvement in social, economic, and political realms (PWAN, 2020). Women and girls are susceptible to physical, sexual, and psychological abuse as well as forced

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marriages. Violence poses serious threat to peaceful coexistence as well as the achievement of the goals of equality, progress, and peace. Women are unable to exercise their fundamental freedoms and rights due to violence. The National Gender-Based Violence Dashboard of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs shows that 27,698 cases of sexual and gender-based violence were recorded in Nigeria between 2020 and 2023 out of which 1,145 were considered as fatal cases, with 393 perpetrators convicted (Agency Report, 2023). Violence and intimidation reduce women's capacity and legitimacy to participate in post-conflict management, which is harmful to long-term peace, security, and reconciliation (Oluremi, 2021).

Women's participation in peace and security processes in Nigeria is further constrained by limited access to long-term sustainable funding and resources. This lack of financial support poses a significant barrier to their effective engagement in peace-building initiatives (Ahmad & Tank, 2020; Subramanian-Montgomery et al., 2020; UN Women Nigeria, 2021). Their inability to get

immediate help from donors, sponsors and other stakeholders hinders their ability to participate in peace processes. This gap in resources prevents them from successfully navigating the peace and security process, impeding their ability to put an end to violent conflict and foster peace in the society. Furthermore, limited self-esteem and competencies hinder women's effective participation, as many lack confidence and in their ability to engage publicly (UN Women Nigeria, 2021). This often results in women avoiding prominent roles to evade judgement, which weakens their collective voice in peace processes. Other challenges include lack of understanding of the importance of the National Action Plans and the essence of Women, Peace and Security Agenda as vital tools for advancing the role of women in peace and security (PWAN, 2020).

Conclusion

Women's participation in formal peace and security processes in Nigeria remains significantly limited despite growing global advocacy for gender inclusion in peace and security processes. Although women play crucial roles in semi-formal

and informal peace efforts, their contributions remain largely low in formal security institutions, political leadership, and decision-making processes. The barriers to women's active participation in peace and security processes are deeply rooted in cultural and traditional norms, low levels of education, financial constraints, political marginalization, and the persistent threat of gender-based violence. Given the essential role women play in society, this paper argues that their inclusion in formal peace processes building is not just necessary but imperative.

Recommendations

To increase women's participation in formal peace and security processes in Nigeria, the following recommendation are proffered;

1. There is a need for the Federal and State Governments to enforce the existing laws and policies, including the National Action Plans and State Action Plans on Women Peace and Security, and integrate gender inclusive measure into security and governance structures.
2. The Federal and State Government should increase access to education, especially for women and girls so as to equip them with necessary skills for leadership in formal peace and security process.
3. There is need for strong political will, robust institutional frameworks, and increased public awareness on the part of the Government to dismantle the structural barriers that prevent women from fully participating in peace processes.
4. There is need to strengthen laws and enforcement mechanisms to effectively prevent gender based violence and ensure the prosecution of offenders, thereby ensuring justice for victims.
5. The government and donor agencies should provide financial support for women-led peace initiatives, so as to enable them to effectively engage in peace processes.

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Apendix 1

Gender Statistics in Nigeria Police Force, 2022

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Senior Police Officers	22,060 (92%)	1,820 (8%)	23,880
Inspectors	92,137 (93%)	6,852 (7%)	98,989
Total	114,197 (93%)	8,672 (7%)	122,869

Source: NBS (2024: 60).