

## Does Nigeria Need the Office of the First Lady?

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### Abstract

*Modern democracies often have the president's consort addressed as the First Lady. As soon as the president is inaugurated, his wife begins to run the Office of the First Lady. The functions performed by the First Lady vary from one country to the other. Some First Ladies are very moderate and decent. Others are very despicable. Cases have been reported wherein some First Ladies carry out their activities with impunity; yet there are others who treat their fellow citizens decently. It is also common in third world democracies to see some First Ladies converting national assets for personal gratification.*

*In view of the foregoing, this study is being undertaken to investigate if Nigerians feel that their country needs the Office of the First Lady. In addition, it will go further to identify measures to be introduced in order to prevent First Ladies from being lawless.*

*This study will utilize primary data obtained from a survey that will cover the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. The study will provide useful guidance for the development of appropriate model for the Office of the First Lady in Nigeria. The paper will close with findings and conclusions.*

**Keywords:** First Lady, Bureaucracy, Public Administration, Government Ethics, Advocacy.

## **Introduction**

The consort of a male president is naturally addressed as the first lady. This is the practice in most democracies. Being the wife of the Head of State, the first lady is expected to conduct herself with decorum at all times. She is a woman that must be above board in her public engagements while she nurtures a home that gives the president the emotional stability needed for executing state functions. A good first lady that desires to be on the positive side of history usually avoids scandals that may emanate from indiscretions. To a large extent, the public perception of the first lady can have positive or negative impact on the popularity of her husband.

First ladies in different countries play different roles. Some first ladies derive contentment from being seen by the side of the president at social events; they are very passive concerning state matters. Other first ladies with strong personalities seek to exercise power. They have successfully institutionalized themselves through the Office of the First lady thereby getting tactlessly involved in public administration.

The activities of first ladies since the commencement of the Fourth Republic in Nigeria have raised the issue of constitutionality. Is the Office of the First Lady recognized by the constitution? Section 130 of the Nigerian Constitution established the Office the President; however the section did not create the Office of the First Lady. Furthermore, Sections 147, 150 and 151 of the Constitution listed the offices that can be created by the president without mentioning the Office of the First Lady.

In view of the silence of the constitution regarding the Office of the First Lady plus the highhandedness of some First Ladies, most Nigerians have expressed their displeasure about majority of them. This study seeks to investigate if Nigerians think that the country needs the Office of the First Lady and if the Office can exist without breaching of the constitution. Also, it will find out the type of First Lady that will work for Nigeria. Should Nigeria have a good First Lady like the late Mrs. Barbara Bush that was described as the good woman that ran the family that ran America?(Carlson, 2018) or Will Nigerians tolerate an awful First Lady in the mold of Mrs. Grace Mugabe whose ambition allegedly contributed to the fall of President Robert Mugabe? (Onoshi, 2017).

This study will utilize primary data. The data will be collected evenly from the six geo-political zones. Every segment of the Nigerian society in terms of age, gender and ethnicity are going to be covered in the survey.

The paper is organized into five sections. The first section deals with the introduction. The second section takes care of conceptual reasoning. The third section focuses on legacies of selected first ladies. The fourth section presents the primary data and analysis. The final section gives the findings and conclusion.

### **Conceptual reasoning**

In this section, relevant concepts are reviewed in order to get appropriate guidance regarding the existence and operational modalities of the Office of the First Lady.

Woodrow (1887) in his paper on public administration argued that politicians must be accountable to the people who elected them. He further argued that public administrators must be directly responsible to elected leaders. Directives regarding what public administrators should or should not do must flow from political leaders. In this wise, the first lady is neither an elected leader nor a public administrator therefore she is not expected to be involved in the administration of the state.

Appleby (1947) gave the definition of public administration as "public leadership of public affairs directly responsible for executive action. The tenets of democracy dictate that leadership and executive actions must promote the dignity of citizens". The first lady is the spouse of the president; she is not elected and thus has no constitutional mandate to serve as a public leader.

Shields (1998) viewed public administration as the process which "deals with the stewardship and implementation of the products of a living democracy". She used the term "products" to refer to provision of facilities or services such as schools, hospitals, roads and security apparatuses. Public managers, through implementations, engage in the products. The first lady is not an appointed or elected government official so she cannot serve as a public manager.

Weber (1922) pioneered the study of bureaucracy as a concept. In his essay titled "Bureaucracy", he listed the characteristics of a typical bureaucracy as "hierarchical organization, formal lines of authority, a fixed area of activity, rigid division of labour, regular and continuous execution of assigned tasks, all decisions and powers specified by regulations, officials with expert training in their fields, career advancement based on technical qualifications, and qualifications evaluated by organizational rules".

The first lady and her handful of staff cannot fit into the structure of bureaucracy laid out by Weber. Hence, the Office of the First Lady cannot be seen or treated as a bureaucracy. Her office is not managed by specialized government officials for public administration.

Obar, Jonathan, et al (2012) described "advocacy as those activities that a person or organization undertakes. The activities involve media campaign and public speaking". Lobbying is also used to promote advocacy by personally appealing to legislators to get them legislate on crucial issues. According to them, advocates increasingly use the social media to facilitate civic engagement and collective action. In view of the foregoing, a first lady should embrace advocacy and allow her husband to manage the affairs of the state. As an advocate, the first lady can effectively use the traditional and social media to fight social vices such as female genital mutilation, domestic violence, gender imbalance in the public space, prostitution, non-immunization of children and many others.

Douglas (1952) asserted that, "ethics in government should cover issues of honesty and transparency". In other words, government ethics should deal with matters such as bribery,

corruption, conflict of interest, legislative ethics, judicial ethics, open government and the avoidance of impropriety. In this sense, the president can avoid dishonesty and corruption by keeping the first lady, even other members of the first family, away from the activities of government.

### **First ladies with diverse legacies**

History is replete with the actions, good and bad, of several first ladies at different eras across the world. In order to get a clear picture of the impact a first lady could make on her country, historical reviews of the deeds and misdeeds of selected first ladies were carried out.

First to be considered was Hillary Clinton. She is the wife of President Bill Clinton. Hillary was the First Lady of the United States from January 20, 1993 to January 20, 2001. Previously, she served as the First Lady of Arkansas State from January 9, 1979 to January 19, 1981 and January 11, 1983 to December 12, 1992. Her law profession and experience as a state First Lady adequately prepared her for the role at the White House. Hillary's achievements as First Lady included the establishment of the Office on Violence Against Women at the Department of Justice, the enactments of the Adoption and Safe Families Act in 1997 and the Foster Care Independence Act in 1999. The audio recording of her book "It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us" earned her the Grammy Award for the Best Spoken Word Album in 1997 thus becoming the first First Lady to win a Grammy Award (Shultz, 1999). Mrs. Clinton's achievement, demeanor and popularity as First Lady enabled her to win the election to represent New York in the US Senate (Rajghata, 2004). She was a US Senator from January 3, 2001 to January 21, 2009. On January 21, 2009, President Barack Obama swore in Hillary as the 67th United States Secretary of State; she served in this office till February 1, 2013. Hillary attempted to break the glass ceiling in 2016 when she contested the presidential election as the Democratic candidate. She received 65,853,516 votes (48.5%) and Donald Trump of the Republican Party got 62,984,825 votes (46.4%). Hillary did not become the first female US President on the account of her failure to win the required 270 electoral votes; she got 232 to President Trump's 306 (CNN, 2016). The fact that Hillary received more popular votes than the eventual winner was a good indication that her role as the First Lady of the United States was well rated by Americans.

Another First Lady that did well in and out of office was Graca Machel. Graca was the only woman that had the privilege of serving as the First Lady of two countries at various periods. Her marriage to President Nelson Mandela conferred the First Ladyship of South Africa on her from July 18, 1998 to June 14, 1999. Earlier, she was the First Lady of Mozambique from November 11, 1975 until October 19, 1986 when President Samora Machel died in a plane crash. She was well respected and her tenures knew no scandal. In 1995, she received Nansen Medal from the United Nations in recognition of her long standing care for refugees (UNHCR, 1995). The Lisbon North-South Prize was awarded to Graca Machel in 1998 for her outstanding work with war children in Mozambique (COE, 1998). She is still serving as the Chair of The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health. She is the Chancellor of African Leadership University, a network of tertiary institutions, with operations in Rwanda and Mauritius (Ayiba, 2015). In July

2017, Machel was elected an Honourary Fellow of the British Academy (HonFBA), the national academy for humanities and social sciences in the United Kingdom (British Academy, 2017).

On May 29, 1999, the Nigeria's Fourth Republic commenced with the Late Mrs. Stella Obasanjo as the First Lady. She occupied the position until her death on October 23, 2005. President Olusegun Obasanjo served the rest of his second term without having another First Lady. According to Pulse Nigeria Business Leader (2017), Stella exhibited four qualities that made her a gem as Nigeria's First Lady: "First, there was no controversy around her personality during her time as the First Lady. Secondly, there was no power struggle between her and the president's handlers. Thirdly, she was highly appreciated by leaders of other countries. Finally, she was a good back-up for her husband even while in power. This she did very well and created a national outlook for President Obasanjo at a time national integration seemed lacking. She saw an opportunity to consolidate this role and did so with the establishment of the Child Care Trust.

The Trust is to tackle the problems of poverty, unemployment, nutrition, health and education as they affect children across the country". Stella left a good legacy as Nigeria's First Lady.

Hajia Turai Yar'Adua, the wife of President Umar Yar'Adua, was the successor of Stella Obasanjo. Turai served as the First Lady from May 29, 2007 until her husband died on May 5, 2010. The protracted sickness of her husband gave her the opportunity to exercise some measures of power through a number of loyal ministers. McConnell (2010) reechoed the concerns of Nigerian citizens and challenged Turai to prove that the president is alive. Prior to the deterioration of President Yar'Adua's health, Turai cashed in on her position as the First Lady by engaging on a fundraising for her project - The International Cancer Centre. The Vanguard reported that the First Lady received N6.8 billion from government contractors and other guests on July 18, 2009. In spite of the large amount of funds already committed to the project, Turai abandoned the Centre as soon as she ceased to be the First Lady. Another case of billions goes down the drains. Her efforts to hide the truth about the president's health were also a demonstration of impropriety.

Patience Jonathan became Nigeria's First Lady on May 5, 2010. She exited the office on May 29, 2015 when President Goodluck Jonathan failed in his bid for a second term. She was a very domineering woman and her behaviour was repugnant to many Nigerians. A highly controversial First Lady, the BBC reported on May 5, 2014 how Patience ordered the arrest and detention of Naomi Mutah. The latter had come to represent the mothers of the 230 abducted Chibok girls at a meeting convened by the First Lady. Mrs. Jonathan felt slighted that the invited women sent a representative. Mrs. Jonathan was so powerful that she was deemed to be a co-president with her husband. Obasanjo (2014) observed, "...there were five presidents in Nigeria, and these were his wife the first lady, Diezani, Odua, Ngozi and the president himself, and that he (the president) was the weakest of the five". Patience also committed heist against Nigeria thereby enriching herself corruptly. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) began the prosecution of Patience Jonathan because of the following assets that she unlawfully acquired during her stint as the First Lady, "N2.1 billion Mabel Resort Limited property, \$12 million domiciled in an account at Diamond Bank, assets held by AM PM Global Network Limited, assets of Pagmat Oil and Gas Limited, and assets of Top Homes Limited" (Premium Times,

2017) According to the EFCC, she owned the listed companies but they were operated by her proxies. Her charity, Aruera Reachout Foundation, was alleged to be the vehicle she used to launder stolen funds. Patience was deeply associated with corruption and unethical practices.

Simone Gbagbo was the First Lady of Cote D'Ivoire between October 26, 2010 and April 11, 2011. Her husband, President Laurent Gbagbo, fell to the forces loyal to the newly elected President Alassane Ouattara after ten years of misrule. Simone was a controversial First Lady and she was arrested with her husband in April 2011. It was reported that Simone was being investigated by the United Nations for organizing death squads (Radio France International, 2005). Consequently, the United Nations registered her in the blacklist of human rights abusers. Simone was among the First Ladies that fell from nobility to ignominy.

Grace Mugabe was another First Lady that was disgraced out of office. Grace became the First Lady of Zimbabwe when she married President Robert Mugabe on August 17, 1996. Her tenure ended with President Mugabe's resignation on November 21, 2017. A woman known for violence, Swan (2009) reported that, "while on a shopping trip in Hong Kong, where her daughter Bona Mugabe was a university student, Grace Mugabe ordered her bodyguard to beat a Sunday Times photographer outside her luxury hotel. She then joined in the attack punching the photographer repeatedly in the face". Grace's reputation as a controversial person was exacerbated when she was given a doctoral degree in Sociology by the University of Zimbabwe in September 2014. Iaccino (2014) reported that Grace Mugabe was awarded PhD within two months of enrollment from the university where President Mugabe is Chancellor. Besides the academic scandal, Grace was notorious for profligacy. Brock (2017) alluded to this fact by drawing attention to her lavish lifestyle which made Zimbabweans nickname her 'Gucci Grace'. Her tenure was associated with conflicts of interest.

Imelda Marcos served as the First Lady of the Philippines from December 30, 1965 to February 25, 1986. Her husband, President Ferdinand Marcos, was a dictator. Pedrosa (1987) drew global attention to Imelda's extravagance evidenced by her collection of over one thousand pairs of shoes. It was also reported that Imelda was involved in the assassination of the opposition leader, Benigno Aquino Jr, in 1983. As the First Lady, she was actively involved in the administration of the Philippines: she used to have meetings with cabinet ministers, business leaders and chief executives of banks. Mrs. Marcos was corruption personified.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

The primary data collected for the research were analyzed using percentages. The results are presented in figures and tables.

**Table 1: Respondents Personal Information**

Factors	Options	Frequency	%
Age	18 - 30 years	157	52.3
	31 - 40 years	84	28.0
	41 - 50 years	48	16.0
	51 - 60 years	9	3.0
	Above 60 years	2	0.7
	Total	300	100.0
Gender	Male	140	46.7
	Female	160	53.3
	Total	300	100.0
State of Residence	Ondo	49	16.3
	Rivers	49	16.3
	Enugu	49	16.3
	Kano	51	17.0
	Niger	51	17.0
	Gombe	51	17.0
	Total	300	100.0
Literacy Level	Literate	295	98.3
	Illiterate	5	1.7
	Total	300	100.0
Employment Status	Employed	78	26.0
	Self-employed	82	27.3
	Unemployed	50	16.7
	Student	90	30.0
	Total	300	100.0

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage distributions of the respondents. It was indicated that 52.3% of them were within the age grouping of 18 to 30 years, 28% were within the age grouping of 31 to 40 years, 16% were within the age grouping of 41 to 50 years, 3% were within the age grouping of 51 to 60 years, while 0.7% were above 60 years of age. On the basis of gender, it was observed that 46.7% were male respondents while 53.3% were female. This implied that both male and female were adequately represented within the study, thus avoiding any bias that could result from gender imbalance. The states of respondents' residence were also sorted and the result revealed that 16.3% were residents of Ondo State, 16.3% were residents of

Rivers State, 16.3% were residents of Enugu State, 17% were residents of Kano State, 17% were residents of Niger State, and 17% were residents of Gombe State. This implied that the 6 states, each from a geo-political zone, were evenly represented within the research. Considering the educational status of the respondents, it was noted that 98.3% were literate while just 1.7% were illiterate, thus showing that majority could actually understand and self-evaluate the statements requiring their responses within the research questionnaire. Lastly, the employment status of the respondents was tested and the result revealed that 26% were employed, 27.3% were self-employed, 16.7% were unemployed, and 30% were students.

8

Testing the desirability of the office of the First Lady and its relevance to the government, the statements were also analyzed using frequency and percentage distributions; and the results are presented below.

**Table 2:**

Statement	Responses	Frequency	%
The Office of the First Lady is another government within the elected government	Agree	126	42
	Disagree	171	57
	Not Sure	3	1.0
	Total	300	100.0

The result indicated that 42% of the respondents agreed that the Office of the First Lady is another government within the elected government, 57% disagreed, while just 1% was undecided. Though the majority disagreed that the Office of the First Lady was not another government within the elected government; the indication of 42% agreeing that the Office was a parallel government implied that a significant number of people did not have a good perception of the Office.

**Table 3:**

Statement	Responses	Frequency	%
The Office of the First Lady competes with the Office of the President	Agree	12	4.0
	Disagree	279	93.0
	Not Sure	9	3.0
	Total	300	100.0

9

It was noted that majority of the respondents disagreed with the statement that the Office of the First Lady competes with the Office of the President, 4% agreed, while 3% were not sure. This implied that the Office of the First Lady does not compete with the Office of the president.



**Table 4:**

Statement	Responses	Frequency	%
The Office of the First Lady supports the Office of the President	Agree	192	64
	Disagree	82	27.33
	Not Sure	26	8.67
	Total	300	100.0

It was noted that 64% of the respondents agreed with the statement that the Office of the First Lady supports the Office of the President, 27.33% disagreed while 8.67% were not sure. This implied that the Office of the First Lady supports the Office of the President. However, the support may be ceremonial.

**Table 5:**

Statement	Responses	Frequency	%
The Office of the First Lady promotes corruption	Agree	279	93.0
	Disagree	13	4.3
	Not Sure	8	2.7
	Total	300	100.0

10

The test on the statement that the Office of the First Lady promotes corruption was confirmed. This was such that 93% of the respondents agreed, 2.7% were undecided, while 4.3% disagreed. This implied that the Office of the First Lady was perceived to be aiding corruption.

**Table 6:**

Statement	Responses	Frequency	%
The Office of the First Lady is a waste of public funds	Agree	271	90.3
	Disagree	17	5.7
	Not Sure	12	4.0
	Total	300	100.0

Testing the statement that the Office of the First Lady is a waste of public funds, 90.3% of the respondents confirmed it, 4% were not sure and 5.7% negated. This proved that majority perceived the Office of the First Lady as a waste of public funds.

**Table 7:**

Statement	Responses	Frequency	%
The Office of the First Lady promotes the development of Nigeria	Agree	20	6.7
	Disagree	244	81.3
	Not Sure	36	12.0
	Total	300	100.0

Considering the statement that the Office of the First Lady promotes the development of Nigeria; it was noted that 6.7% affirmed it, 81.3% negated it and 12% were not sure. This implied that the Office of the First Lady was not seen as an agent of development in Nigeria.

11

**Table 8:**

Statement	Responses	Frequency	%
The Office of the First Lady is necessary in our democracy	Agree	24	8.0
	Disagree	223	74.3
	Not Sure	53	17.7
	Total	300	100.0

It was observed that majority of the respondents considered the Office of the First Lady unnecessary in our democracy. This was such that 74.3% disagreed, 17.7% were not certain in response while 8% agreed. It is therefore evident that the Office of the First Lady, as it currently operates, is not acceptable to Nigerians.

### Findings and Conclusions

This study revealed that Nigerians want the Office of the First Lady to continue to exist. They are not oblivious of the fact that a first lady will always co-exist ceremonially with a male president. Nevertheless, people are apprehensive of the misdemeanour of many first ladies; especially the ones that are married to presidents who have character flaws. Citizens are worried that the Office of the First Lady is being turned into a government department wherein public funds are used to satisfy the personal pleasures of the First Lady. White elephants are often executed in order to direct the flow of funds from public treasury to the secret accounts of the first family.

The historical review of the performances of selected former First Ladies enabled this study to classify First Ladies into two types: Maternal First Lady and Autocratic First Lady.

Their attributes are detailed as follows:

A Maternal First Lady is friendly, honest, humane and benevolent. She is people-oriented. She engages in advocacy in order to create a better society. She works to leave a good legacy at the end of her husband's presidency.

An Autocratic First Lady is hostile, corrupt, wicked and malevolent. She is power-oriented. She engages in projects which will corruptly enrich her and the rest of the first family. She participates in the maneuver of the political process in order to perpetuate her husband, and by extension herself, in office.

Conclusively, Nigeria should embrace the model of a Maternal First Lady. Relevant laws should be enacted to compel every First Lady to behave appropriately. The laws should guide her regarding how she relates to other people, the projects she can or cannot undertake, and sources of funds she can use for her activities. Besides, the president must be prepared to curb the excesses of his wife. These measures, if taken conscientiously, will ultimately give Nigeria the ideal Office of the First Lady.

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