



Research Paper

The Impact of Education on the Participation of Northern Women in Nigeria Politics

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the acute under-representation of Northern women in Nigeria Politics and the relationship between education and their political participation. In the pre-colonial era, Northern women occupied major political and social positions. Queen Amina, Queen Daura and Iya-Oba led men to battles, conquered territories and performed rituals for purification as tradition demanded. Women chiefs, kings and queens wielded so much authority and influence over their subject prior to the introduction of western education in 1842(Obajobi, 2021). The introduction of western education made women lose their relevance in the society as it became a yardstick for political participation. The study showed that the major factor militating against women's participation in politics is lack of education. We discovered that men of the North are well exposed to formal education than women in the North and South put together. Meanwhile, women in the south were fairly more advanced in formal education than women in the North. Hence, this paper adopts the Liberal Feminist Framework and posits that we need to move our attention beyond "religion" which has been put forward as a livelihood of women getting appointive positions in the North.

KEYWORD: Education, Patriarchy, Northern Nigeria, Appointive Position, Equal Participation

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I. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Gender roles in numerous social orders have driven women to having deficient resources of time, training, cash and lower levels of political desire. Gender ideologies are inborn in what women's activist scholars portrayed as the public/private divide (Krook and Norris, 2014). In many social orders, gender norms customarily attribute various jobs in the public eye for the two genders: men have the essential obligation regarding dealing with issues in the open arena, similar to governmental issues and the economy, while women are given a focal situation in the private circle, the home and the family (Krook and Norris, 2014:5). While it is believed to have been muted over time, this divide continues to manifest itself to the present day, albeit slightly different degrees across cultural contexts. For instance, three days after the International Day of the Girl Child; the President of Nigeria MuhammaduBuhari(from northern Nigeria) made a shocking remark which his spokesman has excused as a joke by saying "my wife belongs to the kitchen" (BBC News, 2016). In a later interview, the President Buharireiterated that one of the basic duties of his wife was to take care of him and the "home". Sadly, his comments are a reality of the society today. Despite laws that have been put in place to emancipate women from the claws of this stereotype, the current situation of women in northern Nigeria are far from what was obtainable in the pre-colonial era; as more women held relevant positions. The beginning of the interest for equal participation traces all the way back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, embraced in 1948, it incorporates the equal privileges of men and women, and the right to partake in government. Different records endorsed by United Nations (UN) part expresses, the World Plan of Action in Mexico City in 1975, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1979 and the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies in 1985 brought about the well-known 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, which was endorsed by all part states at the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women, to an objective of 30% women in dynamic positions.

Interestingly, in the pre-colonial era, Nigerian women were an integral part of the political set up of their communities. In pre-colonial Bornu for instance, women played active roles in the administration of the state, complementing the roles played by male counterparts. This was possible because resources – education

was not a determining factor for assuming political positions. Skills and good morals were some of the yardsticks used in selecting age grade leaders of which women participated fully. More so, there was no language barrier as Hausa and Arabic were the official languages spoken by all. Women also played significant roles in the political history of ancient Zaria. The modern city of Zaria was founded in the first half of the 16th century by a woman called Queen BakwaTuruku (Oluyemi, 2016). She had a daughter called Amina who later succeeded her as Queen. Queen Amina was a great and powerful warrior. She built a high wall around Zaria in order to protect the city from invasion and extended the boundaries of her territory beyond Bauchi and she made Zaria a prominent commercial center (Abdulahi, 2002). The story was not different in ancient Yoruba state, where Oba ruled with the assistance of a number of women referred to as female traditional chiefs. They consisted of eight titled women of the highest rank. Moremi and Emotan were great amazons who displayed wonderful bravery and strength in the politics of Ife and Benin respectively, while OmuOkwei dominated the commercial scene of Ossomari in present day Delta State (Ifecho, 2004). Also, the legend Inikpi made vital political contributions in the Igala kingdom during the Igala-Apa war (Obajobi, 2021). What went wrong? At what point were women sidelined from politics? The gendered educational system played a major role in producing the large male population that dominated the political arena during Nigeria's nationalist struggles (Ogunyankin, 2012).

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

A plethora of studies (especially - Agbalajobi, Oluyemi, Anigwe and Para Mallam) in Nigeria have focused on the issue of women's participation in life, some have dealt with how northern Nigerian women contributed with men in the pre-colonial epoch up till the independence era (1900-1960), especially in politics, economy, agriculture, factories, hospitals and many more (Para-Mallam, 2011). In contrast to the extensive literature available in the 60s on women's representation, the democratic era has not been subject to systematic and rigorous research; as most researchers have focused on the issue of marginalization, patriarchal dominance, religion and culture. It is against this backdrop, that this paper seeks to address the problem of gender inequality, with emphasis on northern women's participation in Nigeria politics from 1999, focusing on a new paradigm that has not been fully explored as to the low representation of women's participation in politics (education).

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The primary nub of concern of this study is to analyze the fundamental issues of women's political representation in Northern Nigeria.

1. This paper will explore the various causes of low women representation in Nigeria.
2. It will make recommendations and strategies needed for greater inclusion of women in general into the political process.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study made use of a good qualitative research design known as Case Study and concentrates on women in northern Nigeria because tentative statistics derived from the region is alarming -out of 159 appointive positions available in Nigeria after the 2015 election, only 14 women got the appointment in the North. This is worrisome; hence, we decided to explore other neglected factors that may have been responsible for the underrepresentation of women in the North. The research methods employed are derived from both primary and secondary sources - Primary data were consulted using documentaries; for secondary sources, books, journals and reports from the National Bureau of statistics, National House of Assembly and National Center for Women Development were consulted. The retrieved data from books, journals and newspapers were analyzed using content analysis while sources were reported using the triangulation process.

FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN NIGERIA

One of the aims of scholarship is to discover new facts and challenge some existing facts about society to enhance the quantum of knowledge available to humanity. Academic scholars have concentrated more on issues like marginalization, social dominance, patriarchy, religion and culture as factors responsible for the low participation of women in politics. Albeit, these assertions are true but are not the dominant factors in the northern society; as education has not yet been explored as an important aspect.

- **Lack of Affirmative Action Quota**

In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly took on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The 1999 Nigeria Constitution provided somewhat similar affirmative action to supplement non-discrimination of contending parties. However, the Constitution was not explicit in ensuring equal representation on sexual bases. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria takes no cognizance of the disadvantaged position of women and has no provision for gender equality. On the

other hand, the Federal Character Principle, which is meant to ensure equitable representation of states and ethnic groups in national appointments, actually places women at additional disadvantage by implying that they can only represent their states of origin. Where culture does not permit a woman to represent her place of birth, she loses an opportunity. There have been many cases where a woman's state of origin disallows her appointment and the husband's state also refuses to endorse her. In many of these instances the government plays safe by appointing a man instead (Agbalajobi, D.T. 2010).

- **Gender Roles/Patriarchy**

Patriarchal practice is inherent in the Nigeria society has been credited to the under representation of women in legislative issues (Tawo et al., 2009). The introduction of a democratic administration in 1999 saw an expansion in both elective and selective positions for women. In any case, the 6.7 percent expansion since 1999 after vote based system has stayed steady and far underneath the worldwide normal of 22.5 percent (Oluyemi, O., 2016). Different constitutions that have been set up from the colonial era (1914 to 1954) excluded women. The Independence Constitution did not make any spot for women; they had no role. The 1979 Constitution attempted to cure the circumstance for women by expressing in some segment 39, subsection 1, that there ought to be no segregation on the premise of gender. The constitution additionally neglected to think about the hindrances/disadvantages that women have faced for quite a long time and did not make any arrangements for gender equality and value (Segun, 2012).

- **Religious and Cultural Barriers**

Both Christianity and Islam do not accord women much role in public life, and same is obtainable in most cultural values, where women are seen culturally as quite submissive and are not to be seen in public domain (Iloh and Alumona, 2008). The religion (Islam) and cultural values which is dominant in the North are some of the reasons to the low representation of northern women in Nigeria politics (Callaway, B.J.1987). Accordingly, the general thrust for women in the Quran is that they are dependent on men and are fulfilled only through subordination to them. It is widely believed in this part of the world that God is mighty and wise, hence, he has made the role of women a complementary one to that of men and not equal in any sense of the word. Therefore, any discussion of public roles for women takes place in relation to the concepts of Islamic laws. The inferior status and unequal treatment of women in Nigeria could be said to be derived from the cultural belief systems that perpetuate women's inferiority psychologically, physically; these systems are also reinforced by the nation's customary legal system (Iwobi, 2008).

- **Lack of Resources (Western Education) as a Major Determinant of Low Participation in Politics**

Resources may include finance, mentors, assets, education and many more. It is no news that competing for political positions in Nigerian requires huge financial backup. Most Nigerian women who seek these positions could not afford meeting the financial obligations therein, despite the wavers giving to women aspirants by some of the political parties. However, in this context education is the focal resource needed in the Northern region for the emancipation of women. The lack of formal education is a major factor to the underdevelopment of Africa and a very large obstacle in Nigeria's development (Nwadiuwe, 2007). Education is first and foremost a social tool that is imperative for the continued survival and growth of human society, positioning individuals to better contribute to societal development thereby enhancing overall social progress (Para Mallam et al 2011).

It is therefore not surprising that women's inadequate access to education from the onset has been the source of the various discriminations that they suffer. In the 2015 elections in Nigeria, education was the benchmark for getting any appointive position - 99 percent of the men in the North who were given appointments are educated; 90 percent had more than one degree in various fields; 70 Percent studied abroad and had obtained Western education; about 30 Percent are academic professors in their fields; 38 appointments were allocated to women, only 14 women out of 38 were appointed from the North, all 14 are Degree holders, while 11 women had more than one degrees (Obajobi, 2021). Overall statistics shows that Nigeria women get almost less than 7 percent representation in government as against the 30 percent Beijing agreement.

The history of Western education in Nigeria is traced to the arrival of the Portuguese in 1842 whose ultimate aim was both economic and religious (Mohammad, 2020). The western education unlike the Islamic system of education that emphasized the real acquisition of knowledge, skills and values, emphasized the accumulation of certificate. At this point, the North was already disadvantaged because Islamic education and Arabic readings have gained prominence in the North, women and children were all part of the Islamiya, and they were rooted in the Arabic schools (Mohammad, 2020). By 1899, Lord Lugard Frederick had proclaimed the Northern protectorate and declared the policy of northern education.

The British administrative language of the native authority in Northern Nigeria was Hausa, in place of classical Arabic which saw many of the mallams in a bid to gain salary employment, not learning Arabic only or

religious purposes and concentrating on learning, reading and writing of Hausa in the Roman script. This was how the British administration fostered vernacular education in Northern Nigeria making Hausa the medium of instruction in most schools in the North instead of English language which was however, neither out of admiration for Hausa-Fulani culture so to say nor the motive to give Northern lingua franca (Gbelekale, 2019). The South at this point had accepted English language and was already learning, reading and writing but the North was inbetween switching from either Hausa or Arabic to English language. The accumulation of certificates which the British administration introduced as a reward or proof for knowledge acquisition has permeated all the levels of the formal education in Nigeria and the North weredisadvantaged. It is important to note that, only Northern boys/men were allowed by most families to test the newly introduced western education while women were asked to remain inthe Arabic schools.

No doubt, the educational needs of women in Nigeria have been addressed in the last decade, especially in such areas as engineering, accounting, management, sciences, social sciences, environmental studies, humanities and marketing (Okediran et al., 2006). However, the situation and statistics of women from the north who are uneducated is alarming. For instance, there is the presence of “Boko Haram” which means “Western education is a sin”. The BokoHaram version of the Sharia law affects the education of girls because it restricts women to the home tending to their families and not at school where they can be educated. In 2014, it was reported that over 276 girls were abducted by this sect from school (Aljazeera, 2019). In 2021 (February), 300 girls were abducted from school in northern Nigeria again (BBC News,2021). This list is just endless and this has made parents to hoard their girls from going to school.

More so, in the predominantly Muslim North, where the Purdah system is still in vogue, women are expected to stay at home and cover their faces so that they could not be seen by other men - the Islamic schools and principles of the Koran encouraged this practice. Until 1976, these women were not even allowed to vote for candidates of their choice, let alone standing for elections themselves. A survey of the Northern region also showed that about 95% of women have no say in decisions that affect them, including political participation. Girl-child marriage stays normal in many part of Northern Nigeria notwithstanding the 2003 Child Rights Act which determines a base eligible age of 18 years. (Para Mallam, et al 2015). Recent statistics from UNICEF reveals that Nigeria is the home to the largest number of girl child brides in Africa,with over 23 million girls and women who have been married from childhood (The Guardian, 17 October 2016). According to HajiaLaruba, she grew up in a polygamous home and her father refused sending any of the female children to school. He believes that the woman’s place was in the kitchen and she had no future; hence, money should not be spent on her. The respondent further added that as a kid, she would cry severally and follow her brothers to school but was always beaten for making such attempts. She concluded that she would have developed strong interest in politics if only she was formally educated and could speak English(Punch News, July 23, 2020).

Table 1: Percentage of Women who are literate in Nigeria

Despite all these efforts at closing the gap, northern women still lag considerably behind southern women in education. The literacy rate of women in the southern zone is higher (over 90 per cent) than Northern zone. In the Northern region the percentage of women who are literate was between 38.0 – 50.0 per cent.

Zone	Percentage of Women
North west	38.0
North east	41.9
North central	50.0
South west	92.6
South-south	94.8
South east	95.4

Source: Adapted from National Bureau of Statistics – Statistical Report on Women and Men in Nigeria, 2018

Table 2: Percentage of Men and Women who are literate in Northern Nigeria

In the Northern zone, the percentage of women who are literate is between 38.0- 50.0 percent, while it was 57.5-76.4 percent for men.

Zone	Percentage of Women	Percentage of Men
North west	38.0	57.5
North east	41.9	53.1
North Central	50.0	76.4

Source: Adapted from National Bureau of Statistics – Statistical Report on Women and Men in Nigeria, 2018

III. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study was to determine why there is low participation of northern women in power and leadership positions in Nigeria. From our findings, the results have shown that women's educational level enhances their political participation and their chances of getting appointive positions into the Nigeria cabinet. The result of this study is supported by the works of Odionye&Ofoego, (2016) who maintained that educating and reorienting women are effective measures necessary for their participation in politics. In the same vein, Anigwe (2014) added that illiteracy is the major challenge facing Nigerian women and their level of participation in politics; because the more awareness a woman has about government activities, the more confident she becomes and this is as a result of higher education. This was not so from the pre-colonial era as education was not a yardstick to obtaining a leadership position. The gendered education system played a major role in producing the large male population that dominated the political arena during Nigeria's nationalist struggles.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has also confirmed that the situation of the north can be greatly improved through the instrumentality of education.

1. Therefore, there is a serious need for reorientation of northern men, they need to be aware that girls/women have the right to be educated, go to school and be empowered. The obnoxious misconception that "the woman's place is in the kitchen" is unacceptable and can be corrected if men are aware of the economic and political development that can be achieved if women are empowered.
2. More so, the Nigeria Federal government should ensure that the issue of unrest in northern Nigeria which was created by the insurgent group (Boko Haram), Fulani herdsmen and bandits must be addressed to make education accessible and exciting for all. Most schools in the north are under siege, students are afraid of going to school to avoid kidnap or bombing.
3. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should reduce the cost of obtaining the tickets to run in an election. The Presidential nomination forms cost 45 million naira (\$112,500) and Governorship ticket cost 22.5 million naira (\$56,250).
4. The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs should strengthen and create a mutual relationship with community-based women's groups -organizing training programmes, relevant vocational skills; providing credit facilities to women artisans, traders and agricultural workers.
5. Finally, women should learn to support women. It is believed that the greatest enemy of a woman is another woman and this is often accompanied with jealousy, envy, and competition and bullying. According to Valen's survey, 90 per cent of women have felt mean, negative and undercurrents from other women (Valen, 2010). For instance, the November 2019 governorship election in Kogi state (Northern Nigeria), only had one female contestant out of the 22 contestants - Barrister Natasha Akpoti. During her campaigns and rallies, you could barely see other women rallying around her, her supporters were men - Until they look inwards as women and address this imbalance, realizing that a win for one is a win for all, they will keep blaming patriarchy as the major cause of low participation of women in politics whereas we are our own problem.

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