FACTORS LIMITING THE POSITION OF NIGERIAN WOMEN IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

HELEN BONU

INSTITUTION: ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY

Abstract: **The position of women in Nigeria's political arrangement are seen to be of a lower level compared to men. There are lesser number of women in political position in Nigeria which is caused due to patriarchy, gender politics, culture, inequality and lack of education. Using the concept of feminism, the study explicitly discusses why women in Nigeria are faced with discrimination, especially in politics. The discussion in the study stems from the belief that the representation of women in politics is in a deplorable state, hence, a need for government to provide various meaningful solutions to ensuring a growth of women participation in politics.**

To explain the nature of women representation in Nigeria politics, this study explores the Nigerian situation by taking into consideration factors such as colonialism and culture that may inhibit female political representation. The study adopts a qualitative methodology approach wherein data for discussion was collected from journals, books, government sources, conference papers, and online sources.

Keywords: **Women, Feminism, Gender Politics, Government, Society.**

1. INTRODUCTION

The discussion about the participation of women in politics varies throughout the world and has increasingly grown to become a major factor in determining the level of a state's democracy. However, in most states such as Nigeria, research shows that women participation in politics is still extraordinarily little and the democratic process remains low (Vissandjee, et al., 2007, p. 33). There is a growing debate in academia and politics about the role of women, and this has caused a stir globally generating serious controversies than resolving the perceived gender inequalities. Over the years, numerous arguments in Nigeria have erupted concerning the position of women in politics.

For many such as the Conservative theorists (Arowolo and Aluko, 2012, p. 780) they argue that the main role of women generally ends in the kitchen. This implies that women are not fit for leadership positions, neither should they be on an equal political level as men. However, liberals (Yetunde, 2003; Agbalajobi, 2010 and Erunke, 2009) all suggested that women are important in the political process just as men, hence, their position in politics cannot be neglected because of different cultural beliefs that limits the position of women in politics.

It is important to note that even though women in Nigeria make up 50 per cent of the population and 51 per cent of voters in general elections, it is very unlikely for a woman to be elected in political positions as most political offices are given to men (Ofong, 2002). Agbalajobi (2010) mentions that women's overall political representation in government is less than 7 per cent (Agbalajobi, 2010). Similarly, according to the Beijing Platform of Action which Nigeria is a member of, women have not still attained the recommended 30 per cent seats in government. It is also important to note that women in Northern Nigeria were disallowed from expressing their political rights until 1979, implying that they could not contest for political positions nor participate in elections until 1979 (Baobab, 2003).

Page | 21

In the Southern part of Nigeria, women were only allowed to vote in the 1950s, in the Northern part, however, despite the political activism of prominent Northern women, the women were still discriminated in political offices. Irrespective of the North and South dichotomy, we can observe that women had never been influential in the Nigerian political arena.

The idea of gender norms has equally created varying opinions, as it is argued whether or not a woman's role is predominantly growing a home or if they can also participate in other socio-economic and political activities like their male counterparts. According to McDonald (1998) intelligence, leadership and business development are not specific to a particular sex, therefore, women just as men are intelligent, born leaders and can take on administrative positions efficiently. It seems therefore that the absence of the under-representation of women in the world of politics may not be due to inadequate intelligence to participate but to other cultural and environmentally imposed obstacles. As mentioned by Almasry (2012), "the major motive behind political participation in any society is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and dispensing power to organize society, harness and distribute resources to influence decision making in line with organized or individual interests" (Almasry, 2012).

According to Arowolo and Aluko (2010) women should be given the opportunity to serve in political position just as men. It is pertinent to note that the proportion of seats held by women in the National Parliament increased from 3.1 per cent in 2000 to 7.5 per cent in 2008 (INEC, 2010). After the 10 May 2007 elections, data from the National Centre for Women Development showed that there were 9 female senators, compared to 4 in 2003 (NCWD, 2010).

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To provide a comprehensive study and to analyse the position of women in politics in Nigeria, the study adopted the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that limit women political participation in Nigeria?

2. What are the measures introduced in Nigeria to increase women participation in politics?

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objective of this study is to examine the level of women participation in Nigerian politics. The specific objectives include:

1. To assess the level of women participation in Nigerian politics.

2. To identify the challenges facing women participation in Nigerian politics.

3. To highlight and identify strategies that can assist women to realize their political leadership potentials.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is important to understand that being a post-colonialist country, the typical Nigerian society has strong roots in culture and traditional affiliation. In support of this view, Agbalajobi (2010, p. 79) highlights that the traditional nature of the Nigerian society has indeed shaped the values and minds of the majority of Nigeria, hence, influencing their way of life. Fayomi (2013, p. 5) taking a gender-based approach also supports the notion that tradition is indeed a defining factor of the Nigerian society, however, women are usually the disadvantaged gender according to Nigeria's traditional arrangement.

Similar assumptions were made by Onyewere (2017, p. 34) who highlights that the Nigerian society is divided amongst a sharp gender divide wherein the man is superior to the woman. Additionally, Abdul, et al., (2011, p. 9) mention that women in Nigerian society are viewed to be lesser compared to men, hence, the cultural inclination of the country is inherently patriarchal. The disadvantaged position of women in Nigeria according to Bakir (2021) is viewed as a growing need for concern, especially since women make up over 60% of the total population in Nigeria.

As a contribution to how culture influences the nature in which women are treated in Nigeria, Aina-Pelemo and Jesutoye (2021, p. 149) highlighted that according to the Nigerian culture, women are treated secondary to men and women's positions are usually as assistants to men with no hopes for a leadership role. This relates to the submission of Bakir (2021) who examined that the poor representation of women in Nigeria has led to numerous social, economic, and

political offences committed against women in the country. For Varella (2021), it is due to this cultural discrimination against women that has led to the increasingly reduced ratio of women in politics when compared to men

For Uchenna (2019, p. 9), the lower number of women in Nigerian politics is a result of the unequal power relations that are culturally established between men and women in Nigeria. Additionally, Orisadare (2019, p. 52) relates women's lesser influence in politics to have been caused by the derogatory position that Nigerian politics has applied to women, therefore, women are not viewed as leaders but are rather considered as those that should be subdued. This act of viewing women as secondary citizens can be regarded as the major reason why women position in power is increasingly low.

Additionally, in the discussion of women's position in the Nigerian society, Madunagu (2010, p. 46) highlights that women in Nigeria have continued to struggle for political representation since the colonial era, and the results of such attempts have grown increasingly worse instead of better. This is due to the belief that in the family setting, a girl child is usually left with no education and girls are generally discriminated against in areas of skill acquisition in comparison to boys. Therefore, the girl grows to become a woman who is only looking forward to marriage ad taking care of her home.

Nigeria is one of the numerous Anglophone colonies in Africa, colonized by the British Empire. The country is located in West Africa and gained independence in 1960 from the British Colonial Administration. According to Country Meter 2021 estimate (UNDP, 2021), the country is regarded as the most populous country in Africa with 211 million persons. Nigeria boasts of a 50/50 population of both men and women, therefore, outlining the importance of political participation and representation of both sexes. However, Agulanna (2006, p. 259) mentions that issues such as patriarchy and political instability continue to restrain women from participating actively in politics.

Despite its abundance in natural resources, human capital and wealth, Nigeria continue to identify as an under-developed country with a continuous growing level of poorer members of the population. Additionally, the country in 2020 was regarded as the poverty capital of the world, which further ignites questions on why a nation blessed with numerous natural resources is still viewed as being extremely poor. This explains why Ojo (2009, p. 691) relates the negative nature of the Nigerian economy to be caused by political elements that have no regard for either equality or community growth.

As a multi-ethnic society with over 250 ethnic groups, equality in politics is not only dependent on gender arrangement but is also dependent on ethnic arrangement. However, some ethnic demands are being met through quota allocation for political positions, whereas, equality based on gender and quota allocation is not being provided to women to ensure their right in political activities.

As highlighted by Nwoye (2007, p. 169), when women are in political positions, society usually benefits from this, hence, state development is increased. In Nigeria, the few examples of women in political positions both currently and before has shown that women are indeed extremely competent to deliver in political positions, hence, the non-participation of women in politics in Nigeria is usually related to issues or factors that may be beyond their control, factors that may be socio-political.

Women political participation in Nigeria faces an extreme level of underrepresentation, thus correlating to Ako-Nai (2013, p. 29) submission that despite the level of democracy in a country, it is common to find women being underrepresented in decision-making levels of the government. It must be noted that women underrepresentation does not come from non-activeness, but rather from other uncontrolled factors. Makama (2013, p. 123) submits that although women make up half the population in Nigeria, they occupy barely 10 per cent of political offices. This has led to the argument that this limited participation of women in politics is a result of gender inequality that is visible in every part of the Nigerian political sector.

According to Agbalajobi (2010, p. 79), the discussion about gender in the Nigerian political system is mostly focused on women as it affects how women are represented in the political environment. Similarly, Celis, et al., (2013, p. 43) explains that politics in its entirety is based on the distribution of political power amongst genders. Therefore, gender politics is not a new discussion but rather has always been an element of politics. Additionally, Herrick (2007, p. 182) mentions that due to globalization and increasing political participation in various parts of the world, the discussion regarding gender in politics comprises various factors that are seen as multi-faceted and subjective to various social and domestic factors. Therefore, the next section of the study introduces the concept of feminism as this aims to bridge the inequality gap between men and women in politics in Nigeria.

5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: FEMINIST THEORY

Feminism as a concept erupted in the late 19th Century as an answer to women's rights and benefits, however, Molyneux (2002, p. 45) highlighted that it was not until the early 2000s that the concept of feminism began to be widespread with a greater number of women demanding equal rights and opportunities as their male counterparts. Feminism according to Nussbaum (1995, p. 64) may be regarded as the right for women to share equal opportunities as men, especially in places such as Nigeria where women are seen as secondary citizens with limited opportunities. Feminism has grown to become an important concept for women's rights and this concept is important in increasing women's participation in politics.

Feminism started as a women's movement which was organized as social clubs demanding political rights. Influential early feminist scholars such as Ferree and Martin (1995. P. 68) outlined that the major goal of clinching political authority as well as the right to vote and be voted for ignited women's zeal for forming social clubs and social movements. Additional the high presence of patriarchy in many nations at the start of the 21st Century motivated increased support of the feminist movement across the world. It is no news that there is still a wide gap between men and women in society. In some instances, women are paid lesser than men for doing the same jobs or are refused promotions simply because they are women.

Gender inequality is recorded in all parts of society, hence, the discussion of feminism continues to increase to ensure that people are aware of the level of inequality faced by women across the world. It is pertinent to note that irrespective of the country's financial status, location, or level of development, women in all parts of the world are faced with a significant limitation in their career, business, politics, social life, and even in the family life. As we have mentioned above, gender equality is shaped by gender norms that mostly limits women, hence, the discussion of feminism is inherently important.

In countries such as Nigeria that is still undergoing development, inequality is present and in most cases are targeted against women. Women in all works of life are expected to work twice as hard as their male counterparts to enjoy a lower level of reward. Similarly, due to the strong influence of culture in Nigerian society, women leadership to many is still very new and is met with huge resistance. In most local societies in Nigeria, gender inequality is seen as a divine arrangement from God and should not be refuted or challenged. For this reason, Nkomo and Ngambi (2009, p. 55) highlighted that although gender inequality is present in every nation, countries in Africa are faced with a higher level of inequality, hence, the need for "African Feminism Theory".

As a result of socio-cultural implications and other domestic factors in Nigeria, feminism is seen as a facade rather than a fulfiling concept. Feminism in Nigeria faces violent opposition owing to the increased cultural practices in Nigeria. Since the cultural role of women mostly revolves around homemaking and home grooming in Nigeria, the introduction and practice of feminism in such a society are extremely difficult. This is partly related to the fact that people are firstly opposed to change or because they would prefer to keep the status quo as long as it favours them.

Feminists in Nigeria are either called "angry" women or women with misplaced priorities, some people may even refer to feminists as people looking to copy every foreign behaviour. Hence, creating the understanding that women subordination is something peculiar to the Nigerian society which should not be distorted by foreign principles. As mentioned by Blay (2008, p. 58), women in most parts of Africa constantly face oppression and abuse, it is almost normal to relate womanhood to suffering.

In all parts of Nigerian society, women are expected to do more than men, yet with very little reward. For example, in child upbringing in a typical Nigerian family, a woman's usefulness is calculated based on how well she can keep the house tidy or her level of cooking. In cases where the marriage fails, the woman is viewed as a villain and a failure for a failed marriage, where in most cases the fault lies between both the husband and wife. In issues of the death of the husband, the woman is inhumanely treated, forced to shave her hair, forced to wear black or white as a sign of mourning for at least a year and in most cases she gets nothing from the husband's inheritance, notwithstanding if she bought the item or not.

There are many other instances where women are treated with disdain at work, college, and in society. For this reason, African feminism may require a more responsive attitude owing to the available local conditions in Nigeria. Gender norms in Nigeria also trigger the fast-rising nature of feminism in Nigeria. Under the classification of what pertains to a woman, political position and leadership position is lacking and if a woman manages to attain this position, she is easily

called a prostitute or she is forced to explain the source of her success. For this reason, most women avoid displaying their success stories.

As highlighted by Igube (2004, p. 54) women in Nigeria are granted lesser opportunities in politics and even when they try to contest, they are faced with a growing level of opposition. Despite the Beijing Platform for Action of which Nigeria is a signatory, women's political position in the country continues to reduce significantly and women do not meet the minimum quota of 30% in political positions. Concerning political appointments, the government mostly reserve ministry such as the ministry of women affairs to a woman and even in some localities, this ministry is controlled by a man. Women have been constantly abused both at home and outside, and they are not duly rewarded or promoted in places of work.

The concentration of female lawmakers continues to decline after each general election and men continue to dominate the political arena. Women are regarded either as personal assistants or secretaries of influential male political officeholders. This has created an idea that a woman's position is to serve as an assistant for the man, or in most cases serve as the man's deputy. The secondary status granted to women is what makes feminism an important theory in understanding women political position in Nigeria.

To understand the limited number of women in politics in Nigeria, we must note that similar factors that apply to gender-based politics in Nigeria also reflects on the nature of women political participation in Nigeria's politics. As mentioned by Oguadinma, Nwakalor, and Ejinkeonye (2017, p. 113), the nature of women participation in politics in Nigeria is dependent on the level of responsiveness shown by the Nigerian society towards women empowerment and gender equality. When women are seen as not only objects of child bringing but as beings of social and political office holders, the societal norms that put the male child before the female child will be removed.

In understanding the position of women in Nigeria's politics, it is important to highlight the various obstacles faced by women. Therefore, the next section of the study highlights these two main obstacles which are colonialism and culture.

6. OBSTACLES FACING WOMEN POSITION IN NIGERIA

In this section, an understanding of culture and how this has influenced the limited political participation of women in Nigeria is introduced. Similarly, the section discusses the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society which is also reflected in the number of women that are in the legislative body in Nigeria through statistical representation. Since culture is an integral part of any society, the chapter discusses how the Nigerian culture enables women low participation level in politics. The study then moves to discuss the influence of colonialism in Nigeria, hence, explaining how colonialism influenced the pre-colonial African culture. Additionally, the section presents a table showing previous female monarchs who once occupied political authority before the introduction of colonialism.

Culture: Culture for any society is very important since this influences the way of life of the society as well the manner of doing things or behaviour. It is easy to understand the perception of someone by looking at their culture, therefore, culture is a strong defining factor of anyone. In explaining the influence of culture on politics in Nigeria, Akunyili (2006, p. 41) posits that due to cultural factors, women are groomed as caretakers of the home from an early stage. This explains why most women are mostly concerned about getting married with a lesser concern of attaining a political position in Nigeria.

Similarly, it must be noted that the Nigerian culture is influential on the general societal outlook of the country, for this reason, women who aspire to run for political offices are generally regarded as audacious, overly ambitious or disrespectful to a man. This has continued to influence the country's acceptance of women in a political position, therefore, forcing many women to aspire to achieve less than they could achieve. It is no doubt that the Nigerian culture is anti-women's rights, this is supported by the findings of Ako-Nai (2013) in his discussion of gender and power in Nigeria.

The patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society has handed over power to the man, instead of the woman, hence, a woman who tries to attain political power is seen as going against the cultural values of the country. This cultural resistance continues to reduce the participation of women in politics and has significantly led to a huge lack of interest in women in participating in political elections.

Colonialism: Colonialism in Nigeria influenced the societal, economic and political structure of Nigeria, moreso, the position of women. As mentioned by Kolawole, et al., (2013, p. 16), colonialism influenced the political representation of

women in Nigeria which transcended to creating gender-based politics in the country. According to Afonja (1996), women in Nigeria enjoyed high political positions in the pre-colonial era, which was as a result of a society where women were respected and equal with men.

During the pre-colonial times, it was easy to find women in upper political echelons, ruling over their tribes, region, clans, and ethnic groups. Additionally, women were seen as the symbol of authority, therefore, in some parts of the country, especially in the West, the men of a tribe would not go to war until the oldest women in the family allows it. Similarly, the woman's position as the homemaker and child-bearer brought her the most power in the family, hence, women were seen as gods with spiritual and traditional authority.

However, following the advent the colonialism, foreign cultures were introduced in Nigeria and the traditional position that was once occupied by women was replaced with tenets of Christianity which called for the submission of women in the society. For this reason, Orji (2018) highlights that the position of women in politics started to dwindle following the introduction of colonialism.

Since it was earlier mentioned that women occupied political positions in Nigeria, the table below provides a list of some women who were traditional rulers in pre-colonial Nigeria:

S/N	Name	Region	Position	Era
1	Luwo Gbadiaya	Ife	Leader of Ife	Pre-colonial
2	Iyayun	Oyo	Alaafin (King)	Pre-colonial
3	Orompoto	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-colonial
4	Jomi Jomi	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-colonial
5	Jepo Jepo	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-colonial
6	Queen Amina	Zaria	Queen	Pre-colonial
7	Daura	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial
8	Kofono	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial
9	Eye-moi	Ondo	Regent	Pre-colonial
10	Ayo-Ero	Ondo	Regent-Monarch	Pre-colonial
11	Gulfano	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial
12	Yawano	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial
13	Yakania	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial
14	Walsam	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial
15	Cadar	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial
16	Agagri	Katsina	Queen	Pre-colonial
17	Queen Kanbasa	Bony	Queen	Pre-colonial

Table 1: Table showing the list of historical women leaders in Nigeria.

According to table 1 above, it is seen that women in Nigeria before the colonial era were very influential in the decision making of the country. However, during the colonial era, women lost their position in society. As highlighted by Igbafe and Offiong (2007, p. 12), the colonialist encouraged male domination over women, therefore, leading to a culture that was deeply patriarchal and discriminatory against women.

To improve the position of women in contemporary political Nigeria, various local and international initiatives have introduced by the Nigerian government and Non-Governmental Organizations alike. The section below discusses these initiatives.

7. INTIATIVES TAKING TO IMPROVE WOMEN POSITION IN POLITICS IN NIGERIA

Various democratic regimes in Nigeria have all sought to increase the political participation of women, especially in the legislature. Similarly, the office of the First Lady of the Federation in every regime constantly strives to increase female participation in politics as well as in society. Since women make up the bulk of the population, increased participation of women in politics signifies an overall higher level of political involvement and growth in Nigeria.

The attempts to increase female empowerment in Nigeria hold their roots in the 1959 National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) that was formed shortly before Nigeria's independence in 1960. This council according to Olojede (2000) was formed as a form of women movement whose major aim was to increase the representation of women in the newly created state, improve the welfare of women, ensure that women enjoy a high living standard, and provide women with political autonomy, especially during decision making. As one of the oldest women associated with a political motive, the NCWS continue to receive a greater amount of support from the citizens and the government.

The creation of the NCWS launched women into the Nigerian political scene and this increased the participation of women in Nigeria's first republic. However, as time evolved, the number of women vying for political seats continued to decline. Additionally, the Nigerian Civil War as well other instances of corruption or violent electoral processes that occurred in the past further reduced the prospect of female political participants. For this reason, a report provided by the Nigerian Group (2011) showed that women political participation has dwindled over the years.

To increase the participation of women in politics, the Nigerian government in the fourth republic (1999 till date) has introduced both local and international practices in political life. Amongst the international initiatives include two major frameworks, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of the Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW was founded in 1979 as an international treaty supporting the promotion of women's rights. The treaty came into force in 1981, currently having members from over 189 countries, Nigeria inclusive.

The major aim of CEDAW is to hold member states responsible for women's rights and privileges, therefore, ensuring that women's right is human right that all states must accord to women. Human rights also include political participation and freedom of expression, hence, as a member of CEDAW, Nigeria sought to increase female representation and participation in government. CEDAW also compiles a report of various countries, showing how women are represented in these nations and ensuring that women enjoy the maximum human right, for this reason, every country strives to have satisfactory results.

8. CONCLUSION

The position of women in Nigeria is indeed a very discouraging one as a majority of society continues to see women as weaker vessels. Women in Nigeria are often marginalized and treated as secondary citizens, experiencing constant abuse of rights as well as a significant level of unequal treatment when compared to the man. The Nigerian woman according to the study are faced numerous obstacles from cradle to the grave, and these obstacles continue to limit the capabilities and opportunities of a woman.

The study mentions that in some parts of Nigeria, especially in the North and Eastern parts, the birth of a female child is often greeted with an increased level of hostility, as women are regarded as objects to be married off to the man. Hence, for a mother to sustain her marriage, she must give birth to a male child that will maintain the family's name. This level of cultural bias against the woman continues even to choosing modes of education. Most rural parts of Nigeria still consider girl child education as a waste of resources, and as such, the family is discouraged from sending the girl to receive formal education.

It is generally regarded that the lack of education and other essential factors needed for human development may in most cases bring about inequality and poverty. Therefore, a woman lacking access to quality education is structurally reduced to depending on the man and is regarded as being unequal to a man. This trend of women insubordination in Nigeria is also related to the socio-cultural nature of the country that regards women as home builders rather than nation builders.

The study explains the limited number of women in politics to have been caused due to the cultural belief that women do not have leadership characteristics. The societal view of women as being home groomers rather than political office holders is due to gender norms and gender affiliations. The study highlights gender norms to have been caused by societal approach to what pertains to a man in comparison to what pertains to a woman. This means, why men are regarded as naturally fit for leadership positions, women are only seen as a helpmate for men. Nigeria as a very patriarchal society continues to limit the position of the woman, constantly limiting female growth to the detriment of the man.

The notion of gender roles in Nigeria has transcended gender politics, therefore, the concentration of women in politics is very low. According to the information provided in this study, it is seen that women's population in general politics continues to shrink lower after every general election, hence, showing below 20 women in the parliament of over 350

seats. Similarly, the concentration of women in the cabinet as well as in other offices of political appointment is considerably low. This still boils down to the notion of gender norms in Nigeria where women are not seen as leaders but as home helpers. Even the Nigerian President who at a conference in Europe with German's Chancellor Merkel mentioned that his wife belonged to the "other room" signifying the kitchen or the bedroom and not in political offices. It could then be understood that the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society applies to everyone, irrespective of position or power.

The study also mentioned other approaches taken by the Nigerian government to increase female participation in government by joining the Beijing Action Plan which requires a minimum of 30 per cent of political seats reserved for women. Additionally, as a member of the UN Women Organization as well as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the country continues to stimulate women participation in government, although this has not created significant results.

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