

Women Political Participation in Nigerian General Election: An Overview on The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations

Penyertaan Politik Wanita Dalam Pilihan Raya Umum Nigeria: Gambaran Keseluruhan Peranan Pertubuhan Bukan Kerajaan

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Abstract: The study looked at Nigerian women political participation and its effects on democracy in the nation. Gender discrimination has become a major issue worldwide that has generated a range of discussions among writers regarding women's involvement and its consequences. This study's theoretical underpinnings and analytical approach were liberal feminist theory and gender streaming theory. Secondary sources of information were gathered, and qualitative content analysis was performed on the data. Numerous factors were found to have affected women's participation in Nigeria's electoral process, including the zoning formula, discrimination in laws and practices, violence, intimidation, and thuggery, as well as a lack of financial support and women's political ideas. It was also shown that these obstacles hinder their ability to cast ballots, which jeopardizes Nigeria's capacity to continue as a functioning democracy. According to the study, the current policy of women's empowerment should be modified to reflect the current circumstances. In order to preserve a democratic government for Nigeria's progress and development, this strategy also gives top attention to appointing women to positions of leadership.

Keywords: Democracy; Election; Nigeria; Politics; Political Participation; Women

Abstrak: Kajian ini meneliti penyertaan politik wanita Nigeria dan kesannya terhadap demokrasi di negara tersebut. Diskriminasi jantina telah menjadi persoalan besar di seluruh dunia yang menimbulkan pelbagai perbincangan dalam kalangan penulis tentang penglibatan wanita dan kepentingannya. Teori sokong bawah dan pendekatan analisis bagi kajian ini adalah teori feminis liberal dan teori pembahagian jantina. Sumber maklumat sekunder dikumpulkan, dan kandungan data ini dianalisis secara kualitatif. Terdapat pelbagai faktor yang ditemui yang telah memberi kesan kepada penyertaan wanita dalam proses pilihan raya Nigeria, termasuk formula pengezonan, diskriminasi undang-undang dan pengamalannya, keganasan, ugutan, kegiatan samseng, serta kekurangan sokongan kewangan dan idea politik wanita. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan bahawa halangan-halangan ini menjejaskan keupayaan mereka untuk mengundi, yang seterusnya mengancam kemampuan Nigeria untuk kekal berfungsi sebagai negara demokrasi. Menurut kajian ini, dasar semasa bagi pemerkasaan wanita perlu diubah supaya selaras dengan keadaan semasa. Bagi mengekalkan pemerintahan demokratik untuk kemajuan dan pembangunan Nigeria, strategi ini juga memberi keutamaan tertinggi kepada pelantikan wanita dalam jawatan kepimpinan..

Kata kunci: Demokrasi; Pilihan raya; Nigeria; Politik; Penyertaan politik; Wanita

Introduction

Without a question, the topic of women's Political participation has grown to be central to the global conversation about development and democratization. This is due to the fact that women make up a sizable portion of human civilization and require comprehensive political participation in the affairs of their country. Women Political participation entails changing the political, social, psychological, economic, and legal, among other facets of women's lives. Women's political participation is meant to be supported by government agencies and institutions. The 1970s and 1980s were designated as "the decades for women" by the United Nations (UN) (Arum, 2010). Four UN-organized world conferences on women were held in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, and Beijing in 1995. These conferences focused on a number of issues that affected women's status in society, including violence against women, women's rights as human rights, and women's reproductive health. Another significant issue that was brought to light was that, despite playing roles that were essential to the developmental process, women were largely overlooked in the planning, design, and implementation of development programs or policies that directly impacted them (Olubela, 2023).

It has also been noted that international organizations interested in women's development in developing nations worked on a government-to-government basis; however, the government was unable to carry out these development plans successfully because of bureaucratic bottlenecks, corruption by government officials, lack of commitment by government officials, etc. This is particularly true in Nigeria, where the inability of government agencies to carry out women's development projects successfully is said to have persuaded international donors to seek out alternative and efficient structures for program implementation. As a result, women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are privately based organizations that prioritize the problems of women. Although it was beset by a number of issues, including corruption, nepotism, sectionalism, and favoritism, the Better Life for Rural Women Programme, which was founded in 1986 by Maryam Babangida, the wife of Military President General Ibrahim Babangida, went a long way in reaching rural women and improving their standard of living through mass education and skill acquisition.

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Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Underpin

Women Political Participation

Complete community development is impossible without the extraordinary cooperation and effective participation of women, who are the primary caregivers, the center of the family, and the guardians of society's social, cultural, and fundamental values (Omoruyi et al. 2008). In Nigerian politics and national life, women have failed to achieve equality, despite their incalculable contributions to the political and socioeconomic development of any democratic state. Women have been competing with men in all areas of human endeavors ever since they learned about their rights (Fasugba, 2000). Nowadays, a lot of women engage in pursuits and careers that were once thought to be exclusively male. Nigerian women have encountered numerous challenges that have harmed them in the political arena since the country's first republic. However, because there are more women in elected and appointed positions of government than

in any prior democracy in this nation's political history, the current democracy has been heralded as a new era for women's political participation. Numerous good societal consequences of women's dogmatic management have been demonstrated, such as a decrease in inequality (WEF, 2017) and an increase in inter-party and inter-ethnic collaboration (Markham, 2013). Additionally, social issues like retirement funds, parent leave, education, and wellbeing are given more importance. Furthermore, it has been shown that women's political participation has a particularly significant impact on women in their communities. Female political involvement, female voter turnout, and public service responsiveness to women are all positively connected with the number of women in decision-making roles across the public and private sectors (Burns, Schlozman, & Verba, 2001). The majority of political analysts believe that women should play a larger role in Nigerian politics and governance. Nigeria has had both democratically elected and military regimes since its founding, and each has admitted that women in the nation have not received the same treatment as males.

Liberal Feminist Theory

It was Mary Wollstonecraft who introduced the Liberal Feminist Theory. According to the notion, women ought to enjoy the same full range of rights as men, which would allow them to freely select where they fit into society and reach their full potential on an equal basis with males. Put another way, women should not be prevented from pursuing whatever legitimate business they see necessary by any artificial obstacle or barrier. The argument continues by stating that all sexes should have equal access to chances and advantages and that no one should be given preferential treatment because of their gender. Since women are generally disadvantaged when it comes to political beliefs, religious beliefs, and cultural norms, Ako-Nai (2005) asserts that feminism is defined by examining the relationship between men and women. The injustice that has been established is the foundation of feminist philosophy, which aims to liberate women from the institutions that have impeded their progress. Nigeria is undoubtedly a patriarchal nation where men dominate women in all spheres of life due to the false belief that women are innately less intelligent and physically strong than men. Consequently, prejudice against women is common throughout society. The idea that women are inferior is based on a set of legal and societal restrictions that prevent them from participating in the so-called public sphere, which impedes their ability to succeed in life.

Women Political Participation in Nigerian General Election: A Review

Women continue to be underrepresented in politics worldwide. According to DiLanzo (2014), women made up about 22% of national legislators in 2015, which is more than 10% more than in 1995 notwithstanding these advancements, achieving female equality in politics will take time. Furthermore, despite numerous international agreements that demand women be included in leadership positions, women continue to be underrepresented in political and decision-making bodies. Only thirty nations had at least 30% female ministers as of 2015, and women made up just 17.7% of all ministers worldwide. There were only 19 female leaders of state in the globe. In 38 nations, women made up fewer than 10% of parliamentarians; geographical differences in women's representation in parliament were replicated globally: Nordic countries make up 41.5% of the total; the Americas make up 26.5%; Europe, excluding Nordic countries, makes up 23.6%; sub-Saharan Africa makes up 22.4%; Asia makes up 19.0%; the Middle East and North Africa make up 18.1%; and the Pacific makes up 13.1%. Women made up 57% of government workers in OECD nations in 2010, but they are underrepresented in high-level roles; in 2012, women accounted for 29% of public sector senior management positions (Olubela, 2023).

According to Oleyede (2016), men have dominated Nigeria's Senate since democracy was restored in 1999. Just three of the 109 senators in 1999 were female, making about 2.8% of the Senate's total membership. The figure rose to eight (7.3%) in 2007. However, the number of female members decreased from eight in 2007 to seven in 2011 (6.4%) and eight (7.3%) in 2015. Twelve out of 360 members, or roughly 3.3% of the House of Representatives, were female in 1999; by 2003, that number had risen to twenty-one, or 5.8%. In 2011, there were 26 (7.2%) women in the House of Representatives; by 2015, there were just 19 (5.3%) of the 360 members. Just seven (5.6%) of the 130 federal boards of public firms in 1999 and 2003 were female. Only seven, or 14.89 percent, of the 47 cabinet ministers selected during that time were female (Oleyede, 2016). A federal regulatory agency nominated a woman as its director general. Two women served as Senior Special Assistance and Special Advisers, respectively. Eight women were appointed as permanent secretaries, six (6) as special assistants, and one (6) as the vice president's special assistant. More women were appointed to political positions in 2011; four out of twenty were appointed as Special Advisers, and twelve out of forty-two, or thirty percent, were appointed as Ministers. Out of 30 ministerial appointees, only six women were selected during the current administration.

In general, participation is viewed as a multifaceted process that includes improving the socioeconomic, psychological, political, and legal circumstances of those who are less fortunate. The majority of traditional communities in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa view women's roles as primarily focused on raising children and taking care of the family's general household. Because women's roles are so clearly defined, they take up the responsibilities of childrearing, cooking, and cleaning, and they even perceive themselves as a figure to be seen rather than heard in their married houses (Fasuba, 2000). This fosters a culture of male domination, superiority, and supremacy where women's opinions and feelings are not given much weight in the grand scheme of things.

National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) and Women Political Participation: An analysis of the Nigerian General Election

Women's low participation is a global issue that has turned into a sociopolitical problem. The anticipated involvement of women in politics has been impeded by African culture, religion, and other social stratification tendencies. Women are not given many roles in public life by either Islam or Christianity, and this is also true of most cultural values. A vital first step in attaining gender equality, the SDGs, and universal progress is women's equitable political engagement. It benefits their communities, nations, and the entire planet in addition to empowering the women involved. Cross-cutting approaches to local and national concerns, as well as targeted measures by important institutions, are necessary to close the gender gap by guaranteeing women's right to political participation.

Despite the abundance of natural, human, and material resources on the African continent, the majority of the continent's impoverished citizens are women (African Development Forum, 2008). The Political participation of women is a significant challenge in nearly every African nation (The African Development Forum, 2008). Initiatives like the African Union's (AU), formerly known as the Organization of African Unity, African Information Society Initiatives (AISII), and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) were created in an attempt to address this issue (Economic Commission for Africa, 2005; Africa Partnership forum, 2007). Women make up around half of the world's population and should ideally account for half of its political, social, and economic contributions (Nwiro, 2012). However, this does not happen as Research suggests contrary. In Nigeria, it was disclosed in an extensive study provided by only 15% of Nigerian women have access to the British Council Lagos' 2012 report on gender in Nigeria (Chant, 2007).

Challenges

Every organization's ability to survive depends heavily on its financial situation. It is the cornerstone of a successful institution. We must first comprehend the nature of Nigerian politics in order to comprehend the financial issue facing women in that country. In Nigerian slang, politics could be interpreted in terms of monetization. For any political candidate to succeed in the election, they must have prepared to obtain all the resources required. In Nigeria, the expenses of waging an election campaign are too high for women to afford (Suleiman, 2017). These expenses include party nomination forms, which can cost millions of naira, election campaigns, gifts for godfathers, organizing supporters, and funding for political party leaders, among other things. Women are deterred from participating in democratic elections by this financial cost. Issues Concerning Women It is believed that women are their own worst adversaries. According to a Women in Higher Education article, women place a high value on relationships and want them to be on an even playing field. When something, like a promotion, throws off this equilibrium, it causes feelings of unease (Suleiman, 2017).

Numerous issues hinder women's political participation. Amundsen and Kayuni (2016) pointed out that in addition to obstacles to women's involvement, there are not many female candidates. Among the structural barriers that women face are but are not restricted to: I. Socialization: perspectives on gender roles in society II. Economics: Women face difficulties balancing work and household duties, particularly when they are the sole breadwinners. This is even worse when a nation's economic downturn results in job losses. III. Politics: Women's issues have not been addressed by political parties, and they have not typically offered extra support to get them involved in politics. IV. Finances: Women do not have access to independent financial resources or political funding.

According to Amundsen and Kayuni (2016), if women were more represented in political parties and government, their interests would be prioritized. Furthermore, the benefits of having more women in political institutions have been demonstrated by actual data. There is typically a significant rise in equality laws and legislation pertaining to women's issues, social policy, and issues addressing the next generation of human rights in nations with large proportions of

women in political institutions. It has also been demonstrated that female politicians employ various forms of political networking and communication channels. Furthermore, Kassa (2015) restates that women's contribution to the survival of the household and the economic and social development of the society as producers and reproducers is indispensable, despite their inferior status in society and their exclusion from the majority of the privileges and opportunities enjoyed by their male counterparts. The involvement and aspirations of women in Nigerian politics have been hotly debated over the years. Some contend that social norms, values, and beliefs that have overlooked women's significant achievements and positioned them in a submissive position are the reason why they are perceived as the weaker sexes. Since it is believed that there are no constitutional restrictions on women's participation, the political enfranchisement of women in Nigeria appears to have preserved a degree of gender equity on the surface (Adeyemi, 2024).

The characteristics of post-colonial politics contributed to women's low political participation. The data also showed how women's participation in Nigerian politics was influenced by their ethnic religion. This is because a higher proportion of respondents accepted the statement. The results support Batha's (2015) assertion that ethnicity is a common awareness of a group's origins and customs; it is cultural rather than biological and takes meaning from nation, tribe, and linguistic, religious, and national identity. According to Oleyede (2016), Nigerian political parties are beset by a variety of issues, such as their undemocratic management, their lack of a gender-responsive political culture, their gender-unfriendly party practices (such as name-calling, money politics, violence, and blackmail, among others), and their inability to mainstream gender issues in party politics due to a lack of technical expertise. The fact that males alone have the authority to define culture, what it is, when it occurs, and to whom it applies complicates the matter. Women are still not seen as capable of holding leadership positions in some communities. Women who enter politics are therefore viewed as electoral outlaws. Put another way, women are supposed to submit to men since patriarchy is ingrained in society. This issue lies in the religion of some societies. For example, in order to keep other males from seeing them, women are supposed to stay at home and cover their faces. They were not permitted to cast ballots or run for office themselves until 1976 (Iloh & Ikenna, 2009). Many modern countries have prejudiced customs that devalue women's self-worth and subjugate them to men.

Customs that treat women as property that belongs to men and diminish their self-worth are discriminatory in many contemporary nations. Even in urban places, women are disadvantaged in the sociopolitical landscape and feel inferior to males as a result of the general consequences of gender bias, cultural norms, and behaviors (Gana & Audu, 2023). For instance, Senator Aisha Binani's campaign and involvement in Adamawa State's gubernatorial elections resulted in numerous contentious incidents and discrimination based on race and religion. Because they accept their status as "weaker sexes," overemphasize the sensitive side of their sex, and equate exceptional performance with men, women also overplay their "feminist posture" as a result of these socially constructed standards and stereotype roles. For example, the majority of customs favor sending a boy to school rather than a female, who is expected to care for the siblings and marry off. This makes it harder for women to compete with men in politics and somewhat increases the number of illiterate women. Rather than serving as a safeguard for women, Nigerian federal law encourages this inequality. According to Olateru-Olagbegi and Afolabi (2011), some cultural and religious beliefs have been practiced for so long that they are now ingrained as legal norms in society that equality laws and international instruments that should protect women's rights are violated in the name of these long-standing beliefs and cultural practices. Section 6 of the Nigerian Criminal Code does not recognize spouse rape; Sections 353 and 360 of the Criminal Code spell out lesser punishment for assaults where the victim is a female; and Section 55 permits the wife to be reprimanded by her husband but denies her the same rights as the husband.

Women have historically faced prejudice and marginalization, which has put them at a financial disadvantage. Political campaigns are expensive and require substantial funding in order to succeed. Men now enjoy productive gender roles and a purchasing power advantage over women thanks to the sensible division of labor and sex-based employment opportunities. Men gain from this economic disparity at the expense of women. Only a tiny portion of affluent women can afford to contribute to political campaigns (Gana & Audu, 2023; Onimisi, 2014). High political virility, according to some academics, is the foundation of Nigerian politics. These people are capable of using force when needed, competing in an unpredictable environment, and marching violence with violence. Women are thought to be too passive to engage in politics and government, while men are thought to be more autonomous, strong, competitive, and willing to fight in political battles. This consensus is also influenced by the beliefs and social conventions that, via socialization, established separate gender roles based on biological differences. Because they fear violence and see politics as a nasty game, women are more sidelined on the field (Gana & Audu, 2023).

Policy Options

To help women who are running for office overcome the high expense of running for office, financial assistance should be made available. State funding, political parties, and non-governmental organizations are only a few of the various forms of support that are available (UN Women, 2021). It is necessary to address the culture that prevents women from participating in the political process. It can be addressed by supporting public awareness campaigns and enlisting the community to drastically change the perception that women ought to be in leadership roles. Support networks and mentoring programs ought to be established to offer a restricted range of guidance or mentoring opportunities to help women navigate this political process. Keep an eye on how investments are affecting women's participation and modify as necessary (OECD, 2022). A multifaceted strategy is required to address the systemic and cultural impediments in order to increase women's political engagement in Nigeria. The state should keep an eye on policies that help control women's political representation, like quota systems for female candidates in elections (like those already used in many nations), which guarantee that women appear on election tickets at a minimum level of participation. (O'Brien and Krook, 2010). To empower women politically, several political power workshops, such as the Nigerian Women Trust Fund, should teach them leadership and political skills (Nigerian Women Trust Fund, 2022).

The government should enlist the help of the media to launch a vigorous campaign against the stigmatization, discrimination, and subjection of women in society. In this context, the Ministry of Women's Affairs ought to run a regular campaign program through the media (Suleiman, 2017). Proportional representation should be used instead of the current majority electoral system. These will lessen the "do or die" political competition between political parties brought on by the "winner takes all" premise that characterizes majority election systems, in addition to encouraging political parties to nominate women for second seats. Women's education helps dispel inferiority complexes and gives aspiring women the bravery and self-assurance they need to compete with males. The adult population in both urban and rural areas should be the focus of women's education. Therefore, the Nigerian government ought to set up weekend and evening education programs in the states for adult women who were unable to attend formal schooling due to various constraints. Members of the National Youth Service Corps assigned to these states ought to participate in this program rather than being sent to different organizations where they are dismissed or rendered redundant after a full year of service. Graduates who wander the streets looking for work can also participate in this program in a meaningful way.

Legislative initiatives such as the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill have encountered almost overwhelming opposition. These efforts have demonstrated the crucial role that the law plays in promoting possibilities for gender equality, but they take time to gain traction and encounter resistance from some quarters, which limits their immediate efficacy. Even though 35% of affirmative action in political offices is the goal established by the National Gender Policy, progress has been sluggish. Women are still underrepresented in elective or appointed roles, despite the campaign's increasing awareness and creation of a benchmark. Lack of political will, insufficient financing, and social hurdles are among the obstacles to the policy's implementation (Oloyede 2016). Quotas for political parties are often a successful and controversial topic. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress, the two main parties, have both evolved quotas, albeit more haphazardly. Although it has been noted that quotas have raised the visibility of women in politics, within party political influence rivalry and systemic biases favor men, resulting in a low percentage of female candidates and elected officials (Adeline et al. 2020). The development of women's abilities and self-esteem to run for office has been successfully accomplished through a number of empowerment initiatives by NGOs and outside actors. These programs, however, only target a small percentage of women and frequently have sustainability problems. The potential influence of these programs is lessened by these larger structural hurdles as well as elements like budgetary limitations and gender discrimination (Suleiman, 2017).

The long-standing, historically low level of female participation in Nigeria's formal political arena can be stopped in its tracks. The Nigerian government only needs to make a deliberate effort to be genuinely dedicated to promoting women's emancipation as opposed to merely political advancement. The following policy ideas are put out in an effort to promote women's political engagement (Suleiman, 2017). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is a document that Nigeria has ratified. Any political party that disregards this rule should be dismissed, and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should make sure that it is followed. Both the respondents in this study and the literature clearly agree that the electoral quota system is a useful approach for correcting low women's political representation (Suleiman, 2017). Therefore, according to a constitutional mandate, women should hold 30% of the seats in Nigeria's National Assembly, States House of Assembly, and Local

Government Councils. This quota system of female gender representation should be reflected in all committees. The government ought to collaborate with civil society and women's organizations to launch a vigorous awareness and education campaign aimed at altering the social belief that women are less valuable than males. Through involvement with several women's movements, including Women in Nigeria (WIN), the Women's Consortium of Nigeria, the Women Law Development Center, the Gender and Constitution Reform Network (GECORN), the Gender Rights Advancement and Development (GRAND), the Civil Liberties Organization, the Rural Women Empowerment Network (RUWEN), the Legal Defense and Assistance Project (LEDAP), and the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) (Suleiman, 2017)

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, although there has been progress, Nigerian women still face several obstacles in spite of the present initiatives. These include cultural customs and a lack of financial resources, which prevent women from pursuing this subject or from becoming proficient in it. We need a more targeted and sustainable approach since the current approaches are not working. Strict legal enforcement is necessary for enforcement measures like quotas to have a significant impact. Supporting women through financial assistance, social change, and political education is also essential. Nigeria might endeavor to fully include women by taking note of these obstacles. This would guarantee that all citizens participate, improving Nigeria's democracy and government. But accomplishing this calls on overcoming challenges and persistent work by communities, leaders, and women. The subject of women's political engagement in Nigeria is very important. For years, women have been marginalized in politics, which has led to awareness of their underrepresentation in public life. As the study demonstrates, historical experience has indicated that women's political positions have played a significant influence in forming Nigerian politics both during the pre-colonial era and throughout democratic government. Therefore, it would be unimaginable to wish away the crucial work that women did to create the Nigerian state while giving men political authority. Additionally, it is unhealthy to exclusively attribute political authority to men in this age of globalization, where women's contributions to global politics are important for maintaining world peace, harmony, and peaceful coexistence.

Training programs on political systems, women's right to participate, and decision-making responsibilities should be made available to men, women, and youth by civil organizations and the government. Women politicians and decision-makers should be made visible by the government and civil society, and a safe and supportive political climate should be fostered so that they can engage in public life at all levels. In order to inspire other women who aspire to leadership roles, the women should establish a network of female leaders with whom they may exchange leadership successes and difficulties. The current policy on women's empowerment urgently needs to be changed to take into account the current situation. ii. To construct a network of support for prospective candidates, political parties should pair them with seasoned female politicians who will act as mentors and assist new or aspiring female politicians in developing their skills so they may be better prepared for future elections.

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