

## **AN ASSESSMENT OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF MALE AND FEMALE POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The aim of this study was to examine the extent to which socio-cultural factors such as age, level of education, gender and electoral system determine the extent to which women participate in politics. The scientific study employed qualitative and quantitative research instruments that were administered on the women that are actively involved in politics as well as some identified women organizations. The findings showed that age, level of education, gender disparity and social prejudice all affect the women involvement in politics in Nigeria. It is believed that the data generated from this investigation would be helpful to policy makers in formulating and implementing policies that will promote gender equality in all public and political institutions.*

**KEYWORDS:** Political involvement, Power relations, Gender roles.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Igwee (2002) defines political involvement (or participation) as the degree and forms of involvement of citizens in governance and related institutions of society such as the economy and culture. It entails the participation of the citizenry in political campaigns and debates, attending strategy meetings of political parties, voting during elections, contesting as aspirants for elections and holding of important government and political party positions (Douglas, 2014). It is germane to democracy and fundamental to the stability and legitimacy of every political system (Agbalajobi, 2010) and a society cannot be truly democratized without the full, active and equal participation of both genders.

Expectedly, democracy entails fairness, equal participation and equal treatment of all citizens – male and female in the representation and control of power of a society. Galston (2001) agrees that political participation is good for democracy but he notes that all democracies are plagued by systematic inequalities in participation. According to Hilde and Catherine (2011), one of the most persistent inequalities has been based on gender such that women are found to participate less than men, which suggests that half of the population's interests are not well represented. Indeed, several scholars have observed complexity and disparity in the relationships between gender and political participation (Henderson, 2006; Anifowose, 2004; Akinboye, 2004; Rai, 2000; Farzana, 2005). Low participation and representation of women in public and political institutions of several countries have been reported. For instance, Douglas (ibid.) points out that gender inequality is prevalent in Kenya as the country ranked 145 out of 186 countries in the 2012 Gender Inequality index according to the Human Development Report 2013. Similarly, Farzana (ibid.) claims that women's participation in legislatures around the world is 15 percent just as the UNDP (2005) reported that despite the pronounced commitment of the international community to gender equality and to the bridging the gender gap in the formal political arena, reinforced by the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform of Action, there are only twelve countries

where women hold 33% or more seats in the parliaments. According to the United Nation's (UN) Human Development Reports (2013), Nigeria ranked 152 out of 187 countries and it was classified as a low human development country.

### **Gender participation in Nigeria's politics**

Before the advent of colonial era, women were noted to have played active role in the traditional political governance (Akinboye, 2004; Ajayi, 2007) but were hindered by the advent of colonial administration (Lewu, 2005; Omotola, 2007). According to Akinboye (ibid.), colonial administration created gender policies, economic interests and generalized patriarchal values that reinforced and perpetuated gender inequality in the country. For instance, the legislative council that was set up by the colonial government in 1922 consciously excluded women (Akiyode-Afolabi & Arogundade, 2003). In the opinion of Ajayi (2007), these practices notably signified the beginning of masculinity of politics and women's alienation from the mainstream Nigeria's politics. Women were not visible in the leadership of the political parties that were established during the era as men dominated the political parties – Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) and other parties (Ahonsi-Yakubu, 2001).

The post-colonial rule was also characterized by ethnic and personality based paternalistic and acrimonious politics that were unfavorable to women's involvement (Ojo, 2003; Aina, 2004; and Ikpe, 2004). The first republic hosted only four female legislators in the whole of the country, a number that was so insignificant as to give women the influence to play any active role in decision-making process (Omotola, 2007). The military era, which started in 1966 until 1999, a period of about 33 years did not promote female participation also. It was an all-male affair and women played only a sidelined role (Adeleke, 2004) as very little was heard of them (women) at the helm of affairs (Anyia, 2003).

Although a slight improvement was noticed in the fourth republic that commenced in 1999, however, women involvement in the political system was still characteristically low. For instance, only 181 position (1.5%) were occupied by women out of the 11,881 available positions throughout the country (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2003). Out of the 109 senators elected into the Senate in the same elections, only 5 (4.6%) of them were females while 13 (3.6%) females were elected into the House of Representatives out of the 360 seats (Ajayi, 2007). No female was elected into the gubernatorial seats throughout the country and out of the 990 seats that were available for the states House of Assembly nationwide, only 12 (1.21%) females were elected (Adu, 2008). It was also noted that out of the 774 local government Chairpersons that were elected in the same election across the country, only 9 (1.16%) were females and out of the 8,700 Councilors, only 143 (1.64%) were females.

**Table 1: Women elected to public office in Nigeria 1999-2011**

Office	1999		2003		2007		2011	
	Seats Available	Women	Seats Available	Women	Seats Available	Women	Seats Available	Women
President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Senate	109	3(2.8)	109	4(3.7)	109	9(8.3)	109	7(6.4)
House of Representative	360	7(1.9)	360	21(5.8)	360	27(7.5)	360	25(6.9)
Governor	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0
State House of Assembly	990	24(2.4)	990	40(3.9)	990	57(5.8)	990	68(6.9)
LGA Chairpersons	710	13(1.8)	774	15(1.9)	740	27(3.6)	740	-
Councilors	6368	69(1.1)	6368	267(4.2)	6368	235(3.7)	6368	-

Source: NBS (2013-2015)

The table reveals insignificant increment in the Senatorial and House of Representatives and state Houses of Assembly elections. It also reveals substantial decrease in their representation in the local government and councilors elections for the same years.

In a comparative analysis, the British Council Nigeria (2012) notes that the low representation of women in Nigeria's House of Representatives is significantly below the global average (15%) and far behind South Africa's and Rwanda's representation (43% and 56% respectively). According to the Council, only about 4% of Nigeria's Councilors are women, compared with South Africa's declining but still credible 38%. It also notes that female representation is much lower in the Northern part of the country than in the South at all levels.

**Table 2: Women elected to political office by region in Nigeria's general elections in 2011**

2011	Governor	Senate	House of Representatives	State House of Assembly
North Central	0	1	2	15
North East	0	1	4	4
North West	0	1	1	2
South East	0	2	6	21
South South	0	1	4	12
South West	0	1	8	15

Source: NBS (2013-2015)

The regional differences could be due to certain factors. For instance, youth gangs were hired by politicians to intimidate rivals and the general population as their major security concern (Ladbury, 2011), and women in the south have had the franchise since 1960 while women in the north were not allowed to participate in politics until 1979 (British Council Nigeria, 2012).

### **Factors limiting women's political participation**

Several factors have been identified as been responsible for preventing women from taking active roles in politics. For instance, Adhambo-Oduol (2003) identifies socio-cultural beliefs, attitudes, biases and stereotypes as chief impediments. According to him, these factors form the fundamental part of socialization process in form of gender education and training that men and women are exposed to from childhood and they emphasize the superiority and dominance of men and the inferiority and weakness of women.

Daniel (2012) also argues that institutional framework guiding gender division of labor, recruitment and vertical mobility limits women participation in politics. He finds that women are particularly disadvantaged with their labor often under-valued and under-utilized. He notes that although women are more likely to be employed than men, but their average income is lower.

According to Karl (2001), low education and literacy levels, low access to financial resources, cultural attitudes and stereotypes, religion and socialization inhibit women's involvement in political affairs nationwide. Mukhtar (2013) notes that women constitute a large percentage of illiterate groups in Nigeria as parents prefer to send their sons to school based on their belief that they will have responsibilities in the future while girls are expected to grow up, eventually get married, and thus assimilated into another family. In the opinion of Mukhtar, this "pattern of socialization greatly hindered Nigerian women to fulfill their potentials talk less of entering themselves into politics".

Effah Attoe (2015) reveals some of the problems that women encounter while venturing into politics. According to her, there is large scale discrimination from men folk both in voting for candidates and in allocating political offices. To her, women in Nigeria usually constitute a smaller percentage of political party membership because of the social, cultural and religious attitude of different Nigerian societies which most often tend to relegate women to the background. Impliedly, since men constitute the majority in political party structure, they tend to dominate the party hierarchy and are invariably at the advantage in influencing party's internal politics. In Nigeria, many women register as party members but do not regularly participate in party meetings and caucuses where important decisions are taken. They dreaded such party congregations because of fear of violence and the nocturnal character of the meetings, which they believe, only dirty and irresponsible women can attend (Acholonu, 2001). Thus women remain victims of traditional gender violence and discrimination (Ajayi, 2005).

In the opinion of Ghaji (2007), cultural factors have been an important source of problems for the political advancement of women and have continued to affect the development and reputation of Nigerian women in politics as most of them believe that the male dominance will make their roles in politics inactive and unexpressed. While as collaboration to Ghaji's view, Damilola (2010) concludes that as the consequences of this cultural or societal heritage, women had long suffered various forms of gender discrimination, inequality and exclusion especially, in the area of politics.

### **Statement of the problem**

From the literatures reviewed above, virtually all of the scholars cited agreed that Nigerian women are having difficult challenges while ventured in politics. The social and cultural factors

that enrich men to dominate the public spheres have caused the relegation of women to the hidden corner of politics and thereby marginalized. Observably, women are not only marginalized, they are also alienated from serious political activities as critical information is withheld from them. For instance, in the 2015 elections, which was concluded recently, many women aspirants were kept off at the nomination stage, they are seen as male extension; as people who cannot stand on their own politically but have to be guided by men (Daniel, *ibid.*).

Especially in the recent past, several scholars have documented women's participation in public positions in Nigeria but such documentation has not really focused on factors that affect women's participation in electoral politics. Thus this study aims to investigate the factors that affect women's participation in electoral politics in Nigeria in a bid to bring about possible strategies that can be used to enhance their participation.

### **Objectives of the study**

Generally, the objective of this study is to investigate the factors that affect women's participation in electoral politics in Nigeria. Explicitly, it intends to:

- 1) Appraise the positions that women occupy in public spheres in Nigeria.
- 2) Establish the factors that affect women's participation in electoral politics in Nigeria.
- 3) Investigate the structures and procedures that underpin the subordinate positions of women in political privilege.
- 4) Make probable recommendations that can increase women's equality and active involvement in political structures and policy-making.

### **Research questions**

This study aims to seek answers to the following questions:

- 1) What are the factors that determine the electoral behavior of women in Nigeria?
- 2) Does educational background affect women's participation in electoral contests?
- 3) Do cultural factors affect women's active participation in politics in Nigeria?
- 4) Does the fear of intimidation impede women in contesting for electoral offices?

### **Significance of the study**

Significantly, this study will not only determine the extent of participation of women in electoral politics but it will also explore the socio-cultural factors that hinder women's active participation. The fact that the study is a post-election analysis of women's participation in the just concluded general elections, which led to a new political dispensation in Nigeria further authenticate its significance. Expectedly, the data generated from this study would be helpful in formulating policies that will promote gender equality in all public and leadership structures. Thus, the data will be useful to policy makers, scholars and as well, add to the scanty literature on gender participation in electoral politics in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual framework**

This study is premised on the view that gender is a socially and culturally constructed element that is attached to the roles that men and women play in the society. Henderson (2006) defines gender as the socially constructed attributes, opportunities and relationships associated with being male and female and which determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. Awofeso and Odeyemi (2014) see it as the way a particular society views and analyses the relationship between male and female, which again are determined by a number of factors, especially, the cultural values of that society.

But gender is not only about relationships but also about roles. What the society sets as duties and expectations are attached to being women or men. This is what is known as gender roles. The allocation of such roles is reinforced through socialization, which invariably gives an individual a unique identity in the society. Gender roles vary from one society to another, and change from time to time. Due to the patriarchal nature of Nigeria, gender roles have always favored men and political nomination and representation in the country have always taken a masculine standpoint where women only participate as electorates.

Apart from roles, gender is also about power relations, privileges, rights, responsibilities and duties, which are the social structures through which every society shapes and transforms gender into the institutional arrangement, as well as the cultural and structural contexts of the society. Gender theory strongly believes that social structure plays a significant role in shaping and influencing gender roles in society. It is built on the opinion that women have less power, influence, ability and status than men and control lesser means of production. This is the concept of gender hierarchy of marginalization (also known as patriarchy), where it is believed that male gender should be in total control of all means of production and formulation of policies in the society.

Mukhtar (ibid.) notes that overall, Nigeria's society is patriarchal in structure, given men higher social status over women. According to him, the patriarchy has crept into public life and reflected in the way the state is organized and the result of this is the continuing stereotype of women which justify their subordination especially in politics. It is widely believed in Nigeria that men possess the authority, competitive advantage, resourcefulness and are more aggressive to endeavor in politics while women are seen as weak, inactive, mild and less competitive to involve in politics and decision-making process. The shared opinion is built through socialization, which socially assigns gender roles according to biological variations. Consequently, women's perception about, and involvement in politics had been affected by that opinion and they see politics as a hard and tricky affair. The patriarchal nature of Nigeria is biased, suppressive and undermining women's self-confidence. The overall impact of such gender bias, which is embedded in the cultural norms and practices have placed women at a disadvantage position when it comes to politicking, especially, during electioneering. Institutional arrangement, cultural factors and structural context of the country, which are oriented towards patriarch, thus provide the framework upon which women accept and play a subordinate role in Nigeria.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research design

Three types of research design will be employed by this study. They are explorative, descriptive and survey. The explorative design has been partly used in the introductory and factors limiting women's political participation aspects of this study. It has also been used to formulate the objectives and research questions. Descriptive design will be used to present and analyze the data gathered for this study and also to identify and explain the characteristics of women who are currently engaged in politics and those who have been unsuccessful in the political agitation. Survey design in the form of questionnaire will be used as the research instrument to collect data for the study. Precisely, the questionnaire was close-ended and the questions were structured in consistence with the objectives and research questions of the study.

### Participants

In other to elicit information about women's participatory roles in elections and their perceptions about party politics, a total number of six hundred and sixty (660) women were randomly surveyed. The study was conducted in Lagos and Ogun states. Making use of cluster random sampling, the two states were grouped into Lagos state (Lagos East, Lagos West and Lagos Central); Ogun (Ogun East, Ogun West and Ogun Central) which are the senatorial districts of the two states. Two hundred and fifty five (255) women were randomly chosen from each state, that is, eighty five (85) women per senatorial district, given a total number of five hundred and ten (510). A questionnaire that was purposely drawn in line with the objectives of this study was administered on the selected women during political rallies at the senatorial districts. The questionnaire was also administered on one hundred and fifty (150) members of five (5) different women organizations. Specifically, thirty (30) women were chosen from each of the following women organizations: Gender and Development Action (GADA), Grassroots Women Initiative (GWI), Forum of Nigeria Women in Politics (FONWIP), Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON) and Women's Aid Collective (WACOL). The questionnaires were randomly administered (on different occasions) on the selected women either during a regular meeting or workshops and seminars organized by the offices of the organizations for their members.

In all, responses were obtained from six hundred and thirty (630) women (five hundred and ten (510) at different senatorial rallies and one hundred and fifty (150) members of five different women groups. Eventually, six hundred and thirty (630) questionnaires that were appropriately completed and returned, which makes a response rate of 95.5% were used in the descriptive analysis. The questionnaire contained seventeen (17) items and was divided into two sections. The first section asked respondents about their demographic characteristics such as age, ethnic background, marital status, religion and occupation. The second section examines how the decisions of the respondents to participate actively in politics and to contest for electoral offices might be influenced by their socio-cultural factors such as academic qualification, cultural beliefs, and perceived gender roles. The items in this section were drawn in Likert's 5-point response format that ranged from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), undecided (3), agree (4) to strongly agree (5). The respondents were asked to mark (✓) either of the response format (as they found appropriate) for each statement.

## Result and Analysis

The quantitative data that were gathered through the administered questionnaires were analyzed using the descriptive approach.

**Table 3: Age distribution of respondents**

Alternatives	No. of responses	Frequency
18 – 34years	207	32.9
35 – 50 years	270	42.9
51 years and above	153	24.2
Total	630	100

Source: Field Survey, December 2014

Frequency of the age of the surveyed women indicates that all were adults. Specifically, 207 or 32.9% of the respondents were between 18 and 34 years of age, 270 or 42.9% were between the ages of 35 and 50 while 153 or 24.2% were above 50 years of age. The reason for collecting information on age was to be sure that only adults of voting age were studied.

**Table 4: Educational qualification of respondents**

Alternatives	No. of respondents	Frequency
No certificate	61	9.7
WASC/NECO	156	24.8
ND/NCE	128	20.3
HND/First Degree	159	25.2
Postgraduate degree	126	20
Total	630	100

Source: Field Survey, December 2014

Pertaining to educational qualification of the respondents, the analyses show that majority of the women were educated (at least basic education). Only 61 or 9.7% had no academic qualifications. 156 (24.8%) had completed their secondary school education, 128 (20.3%) had National Diploma (ND) or National Certificate of Education (NCE), 159 (25.2%) had Higher National Diploma (HND) or first degree, while 126 (20%) had postgraduate qualifications. This statistics shows that majority of the respondents understood what the study was about, and to a large extent were able to provide appropriate information to the issues being investigated.

**Table 5: Occupational distribution of respondents**

Alternatives	No. of respondents	Frequency
Farmers	26	4.1
Traders	112	17.8
Administrators/Managers	67	10.6
Teachers/Lecturers	98	15.6
Civil Servant	93	14.8
Students	115	18.2
Unemployed	119	18.9
Total	630	100

Source: *Field Survey, December 2014*

The occupational breakdown indicates that the sampled respondents cut across various employments. Out of the 630 valid respondents, 26 (5.3%) were farmers, 112 (17.8%) were traders, 67 (10.6%) were administrators/managers, 98 (14.8%) were teachers/lecturers, 93 (14.8%) were civil servants, 115 (18.2%) were students, while 119 (18.9%) were unemployed. The significance of this information is that the administration of the questionnaire cut across several professions thereby encompassing varied perceptions.

**Table 6: Factors responsible for women's poor performance in elections**

Alternatives	No. of respondents	Frequency
<b>Socio-economic factors</b>		
Lack of enough financial resources	72	11.4
Low level of education	70	11.2
<b>Cultural factors</b>		
Social prejudice	67	10.6
Intra-party politics	73	11.6
Generally, male candidates are more popular than female candidates	62	9.8
Imperfect electoral system	50	7.9
Unequal treatment of men and women in party politics	70	11.2
Women have multiple responsibilities	79	12.5
The existence of godfathers in Nigeria's politics	87	13.8
Total	630	100

Source: *Field Survey, December 2014*

An analysis of the table above shows that 72 (11.4%) and 70 (11.2%) of the respondents claimed that lack of enough fund to finance election campaigns and low level of education among women respectively, which are socio-economic reasons are responsible for women's poor performance in elections. 73 (11.6%) also identified intra-party politics/conflict as responsible for women's poor performance in elections. 62 (9.8%) claimed that such reasons are attributed to the fact that male candidates are usually more popular and followed, 50 (7.9%) of the respondents suggested that it could be due to imperfect electoral system, 70 (11.2%) agreed that it was as a result of unequal treatment of men and women in party politics, 79 (12.5%) stated that it because women have multiple roles to play in the society, while 87 (13.8%) believed that women's low performance in elections was as a result of the existence of godfathers in Nigeria's politics.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the conditions under which women seek for electoral offices in Nigeria and to ascertain if their sex differences affect the way they are treated by male politicians as well as how they are perceived by the electorates. As a result, this researcher employed qualitative and quantitative research instruments that were administered on the women that are involved in active politics as well as some identified women organizations in Lagos and Ogun states.

The computation in table 6 shows that low level of academic attainment among women hinders their political involvement. Comparatively, men are more literate than women in Nigeria. This is reflected in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Factbook (2014), which reveals that 72.1% males compared to 50.4% females (2010 est.) can read and write in Nigeria. Although efforts have been made by the Federal Government of Nigeria, supported by women organizations (such as National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), Women in Nigeria (WIN), Gender and Development Action (GADA) among others to eliminate gender disparity in basic education and achieve at least 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy but these have not been achieved and has not translated to women's significant featuring in the mainstream politics.

Other socio-economic factors that were discovered in the analyses are lack of enough financial resources of females to fund political campaigns, rallies and so on, intra-party politics/conflicts, imperfect electoral system, unequal treatment of men and women in party politics, and the fact that male aspirants are usually more popular and followed than female candidates in Nigeria. These factors are gendered and really portray established biases against women in a sexist society.

A remarkable observation is that Nigerian women have as well imbibed the biases to the extent that they have preferences for men in elections than their own gender. For instance, during 2011 Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential primaries, Dr. Sarah Jubril (the only female contestant) scored only one vote (the one she voted for herself) despite the fact that there were several females that voted in the selection. Also, despite the fact that women were reported to have voted massively in the recently concluded 2015 presidential elections, the only female candidate in the race, Professor (Mrs.) Comfort Oluremi Sonaiya of Kowa party had only 13,076 votes.

Culturally, the patriarchal system and male dominance in Nigeria are other problems that were discovered in the study. In the same manner, factors such as the use of thugs, the existence of godfathers, unequal treatment of men and women in Nigeria politics as well as the institutional arrangement that confine women to family and domestic responsibilities were also exposed to be hindrances to women's involvement in active politics in Nigeria. Women who get involved in politics are perceived as boorish, disreputable and stigmatized even by fellow women. This position is further worsened by the odd and nocturnal periods that political leaders hold meetings.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is apparent that women are still underrepresented in the party-political leadership roles in Nigeria. For example, it is disturbing that the fourth republic, which started in the country about 16 years ago and which has witnessed five general elections has not produced any female Vice President or Governor. Only 9 out of the 109 Senators in 2007 and 8 out of the 109 Senators elected in 2015 are women. This shows that women are still being marginalized and used as avenues by male candidates to achieve their own political gains. As a consequence, there is greater need for governments at all levels to ensure gender parity in public offices, political power and decision-making agencies in the country so as to put a stop to the marginalization of women that is endemic in the country.

In the same way, political parties should engage in internal democratic structures and procedures that will ensure and encourage more females to compete for electoral positions. Thus bylaws, policies and guidelines of political parties should not be formed in such a way that women would be hindered from party activities. For example, nomination, appointment and election of members into party offices should be based on equal share. In such a way, parties would be seen as the leading institution to advance gender equity in electoral involvement. After all, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his or her country irrespective of sex, race, ethnicity, religion or creed. Since according to Countrymeters (2015), estimated population of males and females in Nigeria as at 2014 are near equal (male = 50.6%; female = 49.4%), then women's equal right of access to political events and proceedings should be pointed up as such will provide a balance that accurately reflects the structure, views and concern of all citizens of the country. Unequivocally, the diversity of perceptions and skills posed by gender differences is extremely important and must be considered for national development.

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