

NORTHERN WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN NIGERIA: ANALYSIS OF NORTH CENTRAL GEO-POLITICAL ZONE

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Abstract

It is a fact that the male have seriously relegated the women to the background when it comes to the running the affairs of the state despite being more than half of the voting bloc. The issue of Nigerian women being suffocated in the Nigerian political terrain cannot be overemphasized as it seems things are not getting better by the day. Men have been seen to dominate the terrain over the years and they have gotten so used to being the ones occupying political positions and it is becoming very difficult for them to give their women counterpart space. Contesting election in Nigeria is a daunting challenge for women. It is more overwhelming for those from the northern part of the country. Since Nigeria returned to democratic governance in 1999, women have recorded low representation in elective positions. Although more women are now actively participating in politics, the numbers of those that won their bids for political positions have been low. Many women fear the risk of the bumpy political landscape. This paper interrogates women participation in politics in the North with particular reference to North-Central geo-political zone. The source of information is basically secondary and the liberal feminist theory utilized as our framework of analysis. Findings revealed that the underrepresentation of women in both elective and appointive positions is as result of culture and religion impediment; the educational imbalance in the North greatly affected their political ambition; huge funds in contesting elections, threats of physical attack and finally, political parties do not provide the space to ensure women's participation and representation in political party leadership. The paper therefore concludes that Nigeria is signatory to the Beijing declaration (affirmative action), that stood for women's inclusion in governance and none of the political parties respects that position. The women should therefore come out to agitate for gender equality in politics with the slogan 'o to'ge' (enough is enough), if not gender equality in politics would remain an illusion.

Keywords: Northern Women, Participation, Politics, Political Office, Gender equality.

INTRODUCTION

In tandem with global standards set on multi-party, plural democracy and political

participation, sane adult, individuals and persons are expected to have equal rights and opportunities worldwide, irrespective of their

gender, religion, culture and race. As such, many political scientist, feminist, media commentators; historians and development experts are of the view that for a society to steer towards the path of development, the women must feel free to be full participants in all aspects of politics. No doubt, women comprise more than half of the world's population and make invaluable contributions to their societies. In many societies, women have, and are still assuming some key roles and one of such roles is that of political activism and advocacy for gender balance.

Unfortunately, the situation in Nigerian political landscape calls for serious structural, systemic and institutional reforms. This is because Nigeria has deviated from the global path and tenets of representative democracy. Democracy is universally agreed to empower the people, both men and women with the ability to partake in the authoritative allocation of scarce resources and values in their environments. Interestingly, close to two decades of democracy, Nigeria has not practically produced a government that is truly democratic and inclusive of women at 35% participatory level; all efforts and policy reforms has continued to look futile. Obviously, the role of Northern women in terms of political participation, despite

their zeal and enthusiasm, have been relegated to clappers during campaigns, victory cheerers, and supporters by singing and dancing during party meetings and other political gatherings. The political class, that is being populated mainly by men who have made politics a do or die affair, creating fear in many Nigerian women and scaring them off the decision making positions with the propagation of religious and cultural practices as hindrance.

Historically, some Northern women have dared to break through the barrier of the male-dominated politics only to end up being rejected or resigned to a less prominent role. Despite being a patriarchal and male dominated society, Northern Nigeria has a rich history of women participation in politics. In the pre-colonial era, the exploits of Queen Amina of Zaria, who led armies to drive out invaders from Zaria, is a strong pointer to the strength of women; similarly, Hajia Gambo Sawaba, who championed the cause of the oppressed (Talakawa's) in northern Nigeria played a key role during her time; Sawaba served as the deputy chairman of Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) in the Second Republic and was also elected leader of the national women's wing of Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) in the First Republic. Notably, amongst northern women is

Sarah Jubril, a former president aspirant under the Social Democratic Party (SDP), and later, the People's Democratic Party (PDP). In spite of the role played Queen Amina, Sawaba and Sarah Jubril in pre colonial and colonial and post colonial eras, the division of functions, between men and women gives very little to northern women active participation in Nigeria politics.

The ugly outcome of this is that women particularly in the north are subjugated, excluded and relegated due to outright violence against them. In the light of this, the paper argues that Northern women have been denied equal access to formal education, employment opportunities, access to adequate health care delivery, ownership of properties, and denial to political participation. Worryingly, women are denied full recognition they deserve, this is especially, in areas where culture, religion, traditional practices and patriarchal societal structures have become a practical albatross to the participation of women in politics, despite local and international laws and policies geared towards the improvement of women participation in politics. Thus, Agbalajobi (2010), argue that about 51 percent of women are involved in voting during elections in Nigeria despite this, women are still under represented in both elective

and appointive positions in the country. Available statistics revealed that overall political representation in government is less than 7 percent. This shows that Nigeria has not attained the 35 percent affirmative as prescribed by the Beijing Platform of Action. This paper therefore, set out to interrogate Northern Nigerian women with particular reference to North Central in politics in this democratic dispensation. To achieve our objectives, the paper is divided into five sections. Section one is the introduction; section two comprises of the literature review and conceptual framework. Section three is the theoretical framework of analysis; section four dealt on women and political participation in the North Central. Section five focuses on the frustration of Northern women/North-Central region women in politics and the final section consist of the concluding remarks.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The definition of politics and political participation, like most social sciences concept, lack a generally acceptable definition. However, attempt has been made to give meaning and understanding to politics and political participation. Politics is a process by which individuals as members of a group share ideas and participate in activities of acquiring and wielding

political power. The whole argument for politics, deals with the acquisition of political power, authority and the authoritative allocation of values and scarce resources. Nigerian women like their male counterpart equally seek to articulate power through political representation. To this end, Alapiki (2010:176) interestingly, assert that records of women in decision making positions worldwide have shown that women in politics contribute to "redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda that reflect and address concerns as well as providing new perspectives on mainstream political issues".

The return to democratic rule on May 29, 1999 after twenty nine years of military rule was a reassurance that the Nigerian state might overcome its impeding crises of underdevelopment reminiscent in politics, economy, international relations; religion, law, family system and intergenerational culture. But few years later, it become clear that many politicians in Nigeria were yet to learn their lessons from the atrocities committed during the first and second republics, and their attendant impact on the slow pace of development in the nation's political sphere. According to Olabisi and Kehinde 2015, the first responsibility by the political class should have being putting in place constitutional

guidelines on how to ensure that no one was marginalized either as a result of gender ethnic group or class. Democracy, under the normal parlance as a government of the people by the people and for the people is expected to give voice to all citizens as regards governance issues. Thus, the notion of the rule of law became paramount.

Women's role in politics which give credence to good governance seems to be of less concern in Nigeria's democracy. No doubt, since the opening up of democratic governance platforms for calls for political uhuru, increasing representation, and elimination of all forms of gender discrimination in our political system are being addressed. As rightly observed by Olabisi and Kehinde 2015, on assumption of office, former president Obasanjo expressed his commitments to women, children and youth; hence his overt commitment to the Beijing Declaration which proposed 35 percent government seats at all levels for women. His proclamation according to them, was followed by the National Policy on Women Affirmative Action in 2000 which stipulated that women should be given 35% positions in Executive and legislative arms of government. However, this proclamation was never fulfilled both by government

and political parties in the country. A major flaw across the political machineries, including INEC, is that 35 percent Affirmative Action was never given any legislative backing in political parties manifestos and implementation. By implication, it means INEC does not have any legislative power to mandate the political parties to fulfill the 35 percent women representation in the executive/legislative arms.

Despite this huge marginalization, it is observed that a great number of women are involved in INEC activities during electoral process as Ad hoc staff and voting processes. It is still debatable that there are more registered female voters than the male in Nigeria and this invariably determines the outcome of elections. This position is shared by the former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan on July 14, 2012 at the meeting of African First Ladies; when he stated that "women can vote us out come 2015 for they made up the larger numbers of electorates" (Punch: July 27, 2012).

Two decades of the rebirth of democracy in Nigeria, the picture of Northern women's participation in politics is still gloomy and not encouraging. Suffice to say, most Northern women are invisible and lack access to governance and therefore affects their decision-making processes. Northern women

contestants are increasingly appearing on the murky waters of local and national politics. The number of women who contested for elective positions at previous elections was significantly low. According to Hajia Salamatu Abdullahi, 'women are generally being short changed in Nigeria political space despite constituting more than half of the voting bloc during elections and they are underrepresented'. We argued that the deliberate attempt to prevent women from occupying political life and leadership positions if left unchecked would end democracy and women economic empowerment especially in the Northern part of Nigeria.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The theoretical framework that underpins the position of this paper is the expression of gender liberal feminism, which claims that women may claim equality with men on the basis of an essential human capacity for reasoned moral agency, that gender inequality is the result of a sexist patterning of the division of labour, and that gender equality can be produced by transforming the division of labour through the restructuring of key institutions, law, work, family, education, and media (Schaeffer, 2001). No doubt, the first tenet in the liberal feminist

theory is the debate for gender equality.

This claim was first politically articulated in the Declaration of Sentiments drafted as Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, with the express purpose of paralleling and expanding the Declaration of Independence to include women. Women are a major force behind people's participation in the life of society today. Not only do they comprise the majority in terms of population, but they also play a crucial role in society as procreators of posterity as well as producers of goods and services. Although women have made great strides in obtaining a vote and right to be elected to political offices in many countries, they comprise less than 15 percent of the members of parliament, and less than 5 percent of heads of state worldwide. They hold only a fraction of other leadership positions nationally and internationally. In northern Nigeria and Nigeria at large, traditional and socio-cultural perceptions of women as inferior to

men prevail, as most states in northern Nigeria, due to the patriarchal nature, foundations and structures of these states uphold cultural practices which totally support the subordination of women. Unfortunately, men continue to dominate women in Political, economic, social, and religious realms in Northern Nigeria. As such Northern women's political participation, endeavours, achievements and roles in such communities is rarely giving much needed recognition. This ugly position has necessitated the clarion call 'o to'ge' literally in Yoruba language (Enough is Enough) that Northern women should be empowered by giving them due status, rights, and responsibilities to enable them participate actively in decision making at the political level.

Northern Women and Political Participation

The tables below indicates Northern women elected in elective positions in Nigeria from 1999-2018

Table 1: Number of Northern Women Elected in 1999 General Elections

S/N	Available Seats	Year	No of Seats	No of women elected	Percentage
1	Presidency	1999	2	0	—
2	Governorship	1999	19	0	—
3	Dep. Governor	1999	19	0	—
4	Senate	1999	57	0	—
5	House of Reps	1999	184	—	—
5	State House of Assembly	1999	—	—	—

Source: Compiled by Authors with data from INEC website

The above table shows that amongst the 19 states in Northern

region, no woman was elected as a president or vice president; in the

same vein, there was no single woman elected neither as a governor nor as a senator out of the 57 senatorial seats available for the north. Moreso, no single woman was elected member House of

Representative from the 184 seats and likewise for the state House of Assemblies. It should be stated that in 1999, Hajiya Khairat Abdulrazaq (now Hajiya Gwadabe) won the Senate seat representing the FCT.

Table 2: Number of Northern Women Elected in 2003 General Elections

S/N	Available Seats	Year	No of Seats	No of women elected	Percentage
1	Presidency	2003	2	0	-
2	Governorship	2003	19	0	-
3	Dep. Governor	2003	19	0	-
4	Senate	2003	57	0	-
5	House of Reps	2003	184	9	5%
5	State House of Assembly	2003	-	-	-

Source: Compiled by Authors with data from INEC website

Table 2 above indicates that amongst the 19 states in the North, no woman was elected into the office of neither president nor vice president; office of governor or as a senator out of the 57 senatorial seats

available in the northern region. Meanwhile, only 9 women were elected as member of House of Representative from the 184 seats available in 2003.

Table 3 showing % of North-Central Women who were elected during the 2003 General Elections

S/N	States	% of Women elected	Number of Electoral Constituencies
1.	Benue	7.24	29
2.	Kwara	4.17	24
3.	Niger	3.70	27
4.	Plateau	8.33	24
5.	Kogi	8.00	25
6.	Nasarawa	0.00	24

Source: WARDC (2003:31)

Table 3 above indicated that in the North-Central region, some women were elected into political offices during the 2003 general elections. It is clear that Plateau state recorded 8.33 per cent, Kogi state 8.00 percent, Benue 7.24 percent,

Kwara 4.17 percent, Niger 3.70 percent and Nasarawa state 0.00 percent. With the numbers of electoral constituencies in these states, it shows that women were not adequately represented.

Table 4: Number of Northern Women Elected in 2007 General Elections

S/N	Available Seats	Year	No of Seats	No of women elected	Percentage
1	Presidency	2007	2	0	-
2	Governorship	2007	19	0	-
3	Dep. Governor	2007	19	1	5%
4	Senate	2007	57	4	7%
5	House of Reps	2007	184	9	5%
5	State House of Assembly	2007	-	-	-

Source: Compiled by Authors with data from INEC website

Table 4 clearly revealed that amongst the 19 Northern states available, no woman was elected into the office of neither president nor vice president. In the same vein, there was no single woman elected into the office of governor, only in Plateau State, North-Central that Pauline Kedem Tallen was elected deputy governor in 2007; 4 northern women were elected into the Senate

out of the 57 senatorial seats available for the north and only 9 women were elected member House of Representative from the 184 seats available as at 2007. With the North-Central producing 3 female Senators, they were Gbemisola Saraki-Fowora (Kwara State), Zainab Kure (Niger state) and Patricia Akwashiki (Nasarawa state).

Table 5: Number of Northern Women Elected in 2011 General Elections

S/N	Available Seats	Year	No of Seats	No of women elected	Percentage
1	Presidency	2011	2	0	-
2	Governorship	2011	19	0	-
3	Dep. Governor	2011	19	0	-
4	Senate	2011	57	2	4%
5	House of Reps	2011	184	9	5%
5	State House of Assembly	2011	-	-	-

Source: Compiled by Authors.

Table 5 shows that woman was elected into presidency, no single woman elected as a governor or deputy. Meanwhile, 2 women were elected into the senate out of the 57 senatorial seats available for

the north and 9 women were elected member House of Assembly Representative from the 184 seats available.

7/2

Table 6: Women elected to political office in the North Central in 2011

S/N	Governor	Senate	House of Representative	State House of Assembly
	0	1	2	15

Source: Compiled by Authors

It should be clearly stated that the North-Central had an increase in the numbers of women elected to political office in the Northern region

in 2011 general elections with one senator, two members of House of Representative and fifteen members of state House of Assembly.

Table 7: Number of Northern Women Elected in 2015 General Elections

S/N	Available Seats	Year	No of Seats	No of women elected	%
1	Presidency	2015	2	0	-
2	Governorship	2015	19	0	-
3	Dep. Governor	2015	19	0	-
4	Senate	2015	57	1	2%
5	House of Reps	2015	184	3	2%
5	State House of Assembly	2015	-	-	-

Source: Compiled by Authors

Table 7 indicated that no woman was elected as governor or deputy in states in the Northern region, Binta Masi from Adamawa state is the only woman elected into senate out of the 57 senatorial seats available for the Northern states. Meanwhile, 3 women were elected member House of Representative from the 184 seats available for the Northern Region.

It should be stated that there was active participation of women from the North-Central states during the 2015 Senatorial, House of Representative and State House of Assemblies Elections. Table 8 below clearly depict the rate of women participation during 2015 Senatorial elections in their respective states.

Table 8: showing the percentage of North-Central Women who participated in elective positions during the 2015 Senatorial elections

S/N	State of Origin	No of Women who participated	Percentage (%)
1.	Benue	01	0.2%
2.	FCT	04	0.5%
3.	Kogi	02	0.2%
4.	Kwara	02	0.2%
5.	Nasarawa	Nil	Nil
6.	Niger	03	0.4%
7.	Plateau	05	0.6%

Source: INEC Results 2015

Table 8 above, revealed that in Benue state only one female participated in 2015 senatorial elections representing 0.2 percent, FCT had four females representing 0.5 percent, Kogi state had two, representing 0.2 percent and Kwara state had only two female representing 0.2 percent. Meanwhile,

Nasarawa state had no female participant representing 0 percent. Niger state had three female 0.4 percent and Plateau had five female participant representing 0.6 percent. It is evident here that a total number of 17 female actively participated during the 2015 senatorial elections in North-Central region.

Table 9 showing the No. of North-Central Women who participated during the 2015 House of Representative elections

S/N	State of Origin	No of Women who participated	Percentage (%)
1.	Benue	Nil	Nil
2.	Kogi	03	0.2%
3.	Kwara	14	0.8%
4.	Nasarawa	04	0.3%
5.	Niger	06	0.4%
6.	Plateau	09	0.6%
7.	FCT	01	0.2%

Source: INEC Results 2015

It is clear from table 9 that the numbers of women who participated in the 2015 House of Representative was on the higher side; Kwara had

14 women, Plateau 09, Niger state 6, Nasarawa state had 04, Kogi 03, FCT 01 and Benue state had none.

Table 10: Distribution of the total number of female candidates cleared by INEC to contest the 2015 States House of Assembly elections in North-Central Geopolitical Zone.

S/N	State	Total No of Candidates
1.	Benue	11
2.	Kogi	22
3.	Nasarawa	2
4.	Kwara	32
5.	Niger	13
6.	Plateau	28

Source: Compiled by Authors

The table 10 above indicates that Kwara state had the highest number of female candidates, 32, followed by Plateau with 28 female candidates, Kogi state had 22, Niger

13, Benue state had 11 and Nasarawa state with 2, bringing the total numbers of female candidates to 108. This clearly shows that the party leaders did not created a

conducive platform for internal democracy to strive in their various political parties to allow women to actively be involved in the electoral and developmental process in their state.

Frustration of Northern Women in Nigerian Politics

Since Nigeria returned to democratic governance over twenty years ago, women have recorded low representation in both elective and appointive positions, despite their active participation in politics. It is observed that Nigeria, unlike other Africa countries, is still backward as far as National Gender policy is concerned. It is of note that in 2016 the Nigerian Senate rejected outrightly a bill that seeks to empower women politically and economically and grant equal opportunities with men. It is imperative to state that in most Northern states, women are regarded as mere object or property that can be owned, controlled and discarded by men at their own conveniences. The political terrain continued to practically promote the stigmatization of women; since it as an environment populated by men and sees women that are involved in politics as prostitute and women who lacked respect for their husbands in the society. This invariably created a scenario to see large numbers of women who will come out to contest for political

positions. The men we argued are not ready to support the woman in actualizing their skills for the liberation and empowerment.

The huge financial demand for contesting elections is also an obstacle to women who seek elective positions. Although some political parties in the country waived the ticket fees for women, they feel the waiver was insignificant compared to other financial hurdles involved in the electioneering processes.

It should be stated that the character and nature of elections in Nigeria is that of violence and thuggery, this therefore explains the fragile ability of female aspirants to withstand threats of physical attacks. Elections in Nigeria are seen as "do or die" which drastically affects women participation in politics.

Northern Nigeria which is a predominantly Muslim area, it is believed that Islam do not accord women much role in public life, and same is obtainable in most cultural values, where women are seen culturally as quite submissive and image of virtue. Hence, they are not to be seen in public gatherings. Thus, this had become major impediments to the participation of women in politics. More so, the view of many is that women found in the corridor of politics, before, during and after elections are not often religious in practice.

Educational imbalance in the North greatly affected her political ambition. Educationally, the northern woman is most often relegated when it comes to the pursuance of formal or western education in Nigeria. The low participation of northern women can therefore, be linked to their level of formal education. Generally, in most communities in the northern states, the girl child education is not giving the much needed regards; this no doubt has continued to affect the socio, economic and political terrain of the area. Moreso, the opposition came mainly from the women themselves than the men, many women were not educated, so they see those more educated as threats in the society.

Another important factor frustrating northern woman participation in politics is that of time scheduled for party meetings to strategize political plans before, during and after elections as odd and is seen by many not to be conducive for responsible and family women. Most northern men, have continued to assert that the slated time are often time which responsible women are expected to take care of their children and family. Hence, political scientist and feminist have viewed these time schedules as a deliberate attempt to side-lining women from active participation in party politics.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is the need to express serious concerns over the imbalance of northern women involvement in Nigerian politics. The marginalization can be linked to social and developmental problems. Enhancing gender equality, especially in politics, has become a universally accepted road map to reducing poverty and sustaining democracy, as well to promote human rights (Usman and Shawai, 2015). The poor performance of women in politics in the north, especially in North-Central had deprived them of the opportunities to beat the fore-front of addressing issues that hindered their development in society. Depriving women of leadership positions, especially in contesting elections, portended a grave danger for the country's democracy, noting that such was a sign that the country had a long way to go.

A multi-dimensional approach is recommended in resolving the impediments caused by societal generated gender inequality and women dis-empowerment through history. The individual at the household level, community leaders, civil society organizations/ NGOs, the government, political parties, the electoral institutions and the international communities and development partners have a respective role in removing a

number of factors which presently constrain women involvement in politics and must be clearly delineated and disseminated.

Political parties should as a matter of urgency adopt 35 percent Affirmative Action as a benchmark in their electoral processes for the benefit of women seeking elective offices. This ensures equity in political participation and governance. The process of candidate nomination in liberal democracy is critical and it is the most vital stage which political parties need to address to ensure women's participation and representation in political party leadership. These stages are determinants for who should enter the ballot paper or party structure.

It is pertinent to state that women should be empower for political participation and institutions of governance need to be more gender-sensitive and their capacities built to address gender issues and their multi-dimensionality. Therefore, the role of capacity building for women in key technical competence such as strategic thinking, effective leadership, negotiation, networking policy advocacy and organizing should be retreated. It is on record that the high rate of illiterates among northern women have deprived a large number of them the

opportunities for skill necessary to compete favourably in political arena and leadership positions in their respective constituencies.

Finally, there should be enforcement of Electoral laws on parties nomination fees, campaign financing and limitation on election expenses in the country. This will encourage women involvement at different stages of the electoral process and enhance their empowerment.

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