

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL CLEAVAGES ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Women in Northern Nigeria are secluded in political positions following ethnic differences and religious backgrounds than women in Southern Nigeria, who participate more in public life. The basis for this disparity is the value placed on women in both spheres of interest. The African tradition relegates women to the background and gives the men a voice. The paper looks at the impact of social cleavages and factors responsible for the low participation of women in politics. The research used both a qualitative and quantitative method through face-to-face interviews with five female respondents. The study focused on women participation in politics making Inferences from data collected through interviews. The fear factor, economic and cultural beliefs were among the reasons for the low turnout of women in political participation. The paper concluded that women should support women and create awareness in enlightenment programmes for women in rural areas.

Keywords: Gender, Cleavage, Political Participation, Nigerian Politics, Nigerian Society
DOI: 10.31039/jgss.v2i7.23

1. Introduction

The Twentieth Century saw a bygone era of social conflicts in the political antipathies imposed on women for a long time. Social cleavages over the years played an important role in determining the level of women's participation in politics. However, the legislation of universal suffrage across countries changed this trajectory for women. Sadly, the level of women in

political leadership is still low in developing countries where other cleavages such as social class, religion, political, regional, ethnic, racial, and gender are a significant challenge. Despite the above cleavages, gender seems to stand out as a major challenge, especially in developing countries.

Little wonder why research on several developed and developing democracies finds a persistent gender gap in women who are less interested in politics than their counterparts. Burns (2007) & Burs et al., (1997), Dalton (2008), Gallego (2007), Norris (2002), Paxton et al., (2007) Schlozman et al., (1999) are scholars who believe men are more interested in taking part in politics when compared to women, however, with attendance consequences for political outcomes and priorities. Bolzendahl & Brooks (2007), Carroll, (2001), Schwindt-Bayer, (2006), Waring et al., (2000) nevertheless, thinks the difference is slight when comparing it with the United States or Great Britain, especially with other cleavages such as education or age. Burns, (2007), Norris, (2002), Parry et al., (1992).

Risman, (1998), Martin, (2004) both scholars agree that gender issue affects all spectrum of society, making it a critical discussion for all. Therefore, participation of all gender in politics is a crucial component of democratic governance, without which society may experience inequalities among men and women. Lister, (2007) Verba et al., (1997) Young, (2004). Thus, including women in political positions is vital for a responsive democracy (Verba, 1996), and the systematic and persistent patterns of gender inequality threaten a balanced democratic performance. Women have made substantial gains in wielding political influence in democratic consolidation Githens et al., (1994) Paxton et al., (2007)) Waring et al., (2000) and are less represented in political leadership globally Norris (2002) Parry et al., (1992) Schlozman et al., (1995) (1999) Verba et al., (1997). "Gender issue is also an indicator of the pattern of national identity which affects democratic culture. Gender inequality is more prevalent in primordial ethnic-based nationalism in opposition to civic, egalitarian, inclusive, and pluralist democratic notions (Nezihoglu 2017, 2016a, 2016b)".

Women's political engagement differences in the United States and Great Britain are not as significant as other notable social group cleavages (e.g., racial or economic). Still, they are persistent Burns (2007) Verba et al. (1997) also thinks there is evidence that these gaps exist similarly in democracies worldwide Inglehart & Norris (2003) Norris & Curtis (2006). Moreover, developed democracies have increasingly closed the gap in gender inequality in

women's leadership positions, making more women not just run for government, presidential, and parliamentary positions but are also elected Lovenduski, (2005) & Paxton et al., (2007).

Despite calling for increased support for women's equality over the years by men because of their population, women have consistently recorded poor participation in political leadership. Anifowoshe, (2004), Henderson, (2006), Bari, (2005). Adu, 2008, asserted to this claim that women makeups 48.78% of the 2006 Census, almost half of the population of Nigeria. However, regardless of the numerical strength of women, it did not increase women's participation in political leadership in the country. Though the global representation of women in political leadership is 10% below average but in Nigeria, the figure has hardly ever been over 3% Ajayi, (2007) Inter-parliamentary Union, (2007).

From the country's independence to almost 61 years after, women participation in political leadership are limited Adu, (2008). The low representation of women in politics has prompted campaigns to increase women's political presence in countries worldwide. United Nations universally took significant international action in favour of women in 1946 when it set up a commission on the status of women Afolabi et al., (2003). However, in the African gender, women still face an identified problem in their quest to participate in politics.

Akinboye (2004) & Oyekanmi (2004) recall in 1976, during the International Women's Year, how the United Nations (UN) General Assembly established the Voluntary Fund to implement the objectives of the UN Decade for Women (1976–1985) to create greater global awareness on the status of women and the girl child. This concern climaxed with the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 held in Beijing, China, with the theme "Equality, Development and Peace", aimed to review and appraise the achievements of the UN Decade for Women Omotola (2007) and also includes the World Conference on Women that took place in Mexico.

It adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which became effective in 1981. Besides, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) work towards strengthening women's political leadership and their participation in political decision-making bodies (Olojede, 2004). These events marked a watershed in human resource development as they brought women, the other half of the world's population, into development.

With efforts made by the international organisation to encourage women's involvement in political activities, the world and Nigeria particularly still witness slow progress of women

participation in political leadership UNDP Report, (2005). The Inter-Parliamentary Union Report of 2007 shows that there are only twelve countries where women attained the critical mass of 30% women representation in the parliament, out of which Rwanda, Sweden, Finland, and Argentina are a handful of countries that have elected over 40% women to their legislative body (IPU, 2007).

Oloyede (2018) opined that though the extant National Gender Policy (NGP) recommended 35% affirmative action for a more inclusive representation of women, females are still under-represented. Several researchers have tried to divulge the factors behind the low level of women in political participation in Nigeria. Still, few studies have attempted to research social cleavages' impact on women's political leadership participation in Nigeria.

2. Conceptual Definitions

2.1. Social Cleavage

The concept 'social cleavage' was coined in the 1950s to explore individuals' political behaviour determinants: Caramani, 2000 defined social cleavages as ascriptive sociological traits that divide individuals into groups.

According to Douglas W. Rae and Michael Taylor, cleavages are the criteria that divide the members of a community or subcommunity into groups. Douglas and Michael (1970) suggested three types of cleavage: objective, attitudinal and behavioural. These scholars argued cleavage patterns change as a society also changes.

Scott C. Flanagan defined cleavage as 'potential lines of division within any society 'using three different cleavages: racial, linguistic, cultural, and economic function to explain his claims. Eckstein opined the actual value allocation by the political system is seen in cultural divergences, in the belief and value systems, and segmental cleavage exists where there are salient lines of objective, social differentiation: such as tribal and racial, regional, rural-urban, sex, generation, religion, language, and occupational differences.

Eckstein perceived politically relevant cleavages as 'dividing lines of distinct groups based on policy perceptions, cultural-emotional diversities, and segmental discrepancies in a given political system'.

Hans Daalder developed a more diverse and far-reaching set of cleavages by suggesting five lines of division: sectional interests, religion, geographical conflict, and regime. He argued European countries reveal considerable differences according to the character and the intensity of the lines of cleavage that form the basis of political conflict and organisation. Douglas and Michael (1970) view social cleavage as criteria that divide a community or sub-community into groups. From the above definitions, we can draw some familiar features from the concept of 'social cleavage' regarded as a 'division or dividing line' of social members into different fractions of individuals, groups, and organisations that create conflict.

2.2. Political Participation

Conge divided the concept of political participation into active versus passive form; aggressive versus nonaggressive behaviour; structural versus nonstructural objects; governmental versus nongovernmental aim, and mobilised versus nonvoluntary actions. Conge, (1988). Taking Patrick's active versus passive definition, he explains political participation involves activities, movement, voting, and campaigning for a political party. While in its passive form, it requires a feeling of patriotism and awareness of the political issue.

For Ver Deth, political participation is about participating in politics. He further defined the concept as citizens' activities aimed at influencing political decisions. Ver Deth, (2001). In their words, Milbrath & Goel (1977: 2), "... those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or support government and politics." While Verba & Nie (1972: 2) put it this way, "... those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take." The salient points to drive home from these definitions are the dynamic nature of citizens to influence the political decisions of a state, society, or nation.

3. Theoretical Framework

Different theories describe the role women play in political participation and the political spheres. However, for this paper, we will use the social role theory and the feminism theory. The social role theory, also called social structural theory proposed by Alice H. Eagly and Wendy Wood in 1987. It explains the perceptions societies create in their mind on the social role of women and men in terms of their similarities and differences. For example, society has subjected women to caretaking roles, while society gives an authority position to the men. Eagly and Wood argue that the underlying idea of prejudice exists in a society where men are

powerful, and women are weaklings. We chose the social role theory to explain the impact gender has on women's political participation in Nigeria considering the pre-colonial era, how Nigerian men have attributed a woman's role in the African tradition to procreation and relegated to the kitchen.

These assumptions are because of the cultural norms and values that the African society places on women shifting them to the background. However, since introducing the formal educational system, many elite women have emerged. Intelligent, educated, confident, and challenged the status quo by participating in the political space. As a result, society's perception of women is fading, and they are no longer as docile or powerless as society portrays them.

Thus, the feminism theory conceptualised gender equality issues with political participation in Nigeria. Feminism refers to the belief that women live an injustice life with no rights and no equality (Zara, 2013). However, the term Feminism appeared in France in the late 1880s by Hubertine Auclert in her Journal *La Citoyenne* as *La Féminité* and in the 1920s in the Arab World as *Niswia* (Zeiss and Oyster, 2011). Feminism focuses on women's experiences and highlights various forms of oppression that the female gender experiences in society (Zeiss and Oyster, 2011). The central thrust of the theory is to remove all the barriers to equal social, political, and economic opportunities for women and object to the notion that a woman's worth is determined principally by her gender and that women are inherently inferior, subservient, or less intelligent than men (UNFPA, 2007).

The Liberal feminist approach focused on achieving equality between men and women. Its emphasis is on the power of a person to alter discriminatory practices in society against women and integrate women into it. (Pini, 2011).

The primary emphasis is to bring equality between women and men in the framework of the existing social systems-do not question the underlying basis of women's subordination. Maurice Duverger opines that many constitutions, codes, and laws establish the equality of men and women in political rights (Maurice, 2010). Equality between women and men in politics in many countries globally has grown substantially over the past fifty years. More women find themselves in elected positions in national parliaments than before, and a record number of women hold executive positions within their nation's government (Loven, 2005).

However, there is still a considerable gender gap in political representation in many countries, particularly Nigeria. Women still struggle to find a place in politics. Some researchers argue

women engage less than men in politics and political activity. Others argued that women's effectiveness in politics is noticeable and classified among the first ranges of political leaders in any country in the world.

4. Methodology

The research used a qualitative and quantitative method in the paper through face-to-face interviews with five female respondents. Only Females participated because of the direct link with the topic and chosen to get their perspectives. The data were analysed using a qualitative content analysis because the research focus was on women participation in politics making Inferences from data collected and interpreted. The sampling technique relied on the availability and willingness of the respondents. The paper obtained secondary data through relevant documents like journals, textbooks, unpublished thesis, internet materials, articles from newspapers, official gazette, etc. were added advantages. The study utilised purposive non-probability sampling to get specific knowledge and distinct individual expertise.

5. Politics and Gender in Nigeria

Olajubu opines women could contribute to the development of Nigeria if they are actively involved in politics. The significance of this study lies because "neither the male nor the female could exist and attain their full potential without the other" (Olajubu, 2008, p. 317). In Akunyili's view, females in a leadership position can significantly influence their countries, particularly in developing nations, if only they are enabled to do so (Akunyili, 2006). The opportunity for women in Africa to be in leadership positions is still scarce. That is why Dauda (2007) contended that women need to be active participants in development; however, for that to happen, the women's gender needs recognition through direct state intervention, which will give them political and economic autonomy and reduce gender inequality.

Chuku believes the problem is more research on political participation to explore women's involvement in their country's government and political process (Chuku, 2009). While Ifedili and Ifedili also believe that governments have made significant advances towards achieving gender equality in many countries, women remain under-represented in the political and government structures (Ifedili & Ifedili, 2009). Considering the statistical representation of women in political positions in Nigeria, the above statement by Ifedili and Ifedili is trustworthy and backing his claims with the appointment made by President Buhari, only seven women in his second tenure, unlike the first term where he had fifteen.

Although Ekundayo and Beatrice attributed that in most societies of the world, women constitute virtually 50% of the population (Ekundayo and Beatrice, 2014). In their paper, Afolabi et al. (2003) explained that “women make up over half of the world’s population, contributing in vital ways to societal development”. Women perform the roles of mother, producer, home manager, community organisers and socio-cultural and political activist.

Though the latter has not actualised, however, despite the roles women play in the home and the society at large, the marginalisation of women remains a paramount issue as women’s voices are silenced. According to the recent report of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), a 2013 report analysed a year ago. It recorded an increase of 21.8 per cent for women participation in parliaments worldwide from 1.5 percentage points compared to the previous year (IPU, 2014). Although women involvement in politics experienced a 13% increment in Sub-Saharan Africa, from 1995 to 2013, from its lower rate of 9.5% to 22.5%. Despite this improvement, women worldwide, especially in developing countries, are yet to be involved actively in decision-making processes—Annual Report of the Public Defender, (2013).

5.1. History of Women Participation in Politics in Nigeria

Historically, women took part in politics during colonialism and in Contemporary Nigeria. The traditional rulers played significant roles with strong traditions (Oguamanam and Pue, 2007). Traditional leaders in Western Nigeria exerted political power, though critical determinants of the hierarchical relationship in the Igbo society earned on attributes that do not involve gender (Chuku, 2009). Gwendolyn Mikell opines men and women shared political power to promote harmony for the well-being of society. For Chuku, women held power in age-grade systems and women courts. Nolte (2008) agreed with Chuku that women take part in the decision-making through the female lines of authority that had existed parallel to male hierarchies.

According to Nolte, women in Yoruba communities held chieftaincy titles and ritual positions where their role was to advise the rulers of their towns and help maintain the social order and welfare of the community. During the colonial era, men and women had autonomy in all spheres of life that created a system of checks and balances that did not consider women as subordinates: Nkomo & Ngambi, (2009). Taiwo explained further that no amount of stereotyping existed against women. Nkomo & Ngambi wrote about the various leadership roles held by women in pre-colonial Africa. Nkomo & Ngambi (2009).

Chuku & Steegstra (2009) describes the power-sharing in different parts of Nigeria, which interwove with the social structures of the society. Women had the privilege to share political power with men during the pre-colonial era. Chuku, (2009). However, Agbalajobi (2010) opines colonialism relegated women to the background. It replaced the traditional political system of accountability, which recognised women's organisations at every political system level with one that violated their democratic rights. (Agbalajobi, 2010).

Pereira (2005) explained that Christianity brought by the colonial masters conflicted with traditional African ways justifying colonial rule and assisted in changing the economic and political order (Pereira, 2005).

Women in the contemporary era participated in the politics of decolonisation in the 1940s to 1950s (Chuku, 2009). The 2002 Beijing Platform for Action reported that women in Nigeria continue to face economic empowerment and entrepreneurship barriers, although their participation in the workplace has increased over the years (Okpara, 2006). Gender inequalities still exist regarding pay, working conditions, and level of involvement. A 1996 World Bank report on gender and poverty in Nigeria suggested that legal, regulatory, and cultural barriers may keep women more disadvantaged than men in access to health, education, financial, and agricultural extension services (Mberu, 2007).

Studies by Adeyeye and Haddad (as cited in Mberu, 2007) showed that women work longer hours than their male counterparts. Like Okpara, 2006 opines, women do not have the opportunity as men. They receive lower levels of pay and greater levels of domesticated responsibilities. Only a tiny percentage of women in Nigeria are in management or other decision-making positions.

5.2. Centrifugal Forces Against Women Political Participation in Politics

One of the respondents, Mrs Juliana Egwu, a businesswoman, gave the fear factor as one reason hindering women from participating in politics. The men fight dirty and are ready to go to any length; women are afraid. Another respondent, Miss Praise Oladipo, a 300 student at the University of Abuja, believes that godfatherism plays a crucial role in women not participating in politics. She cited the top politicians who put their family and friends in authority, neglecting the more qualified women and choosing the men. Apart from gender, several social cleavages prevent women from participating in politics. For instance, ethnicity, and Nigeria is a country

of many ethnicities; this hinders women from participating in politics as some ethnic groups forbid women from being in politics.

Ekanola (2006) maintained that Nigeria is not a nation but a “geographical expression”. He explained further that there is a strained relationship between ethnic and religious groups due to all the conflicts over the years. The result is that it excludes the marginalised groups from receiving any benefits that the dominant groups. An excellent way to understand this challenge is to look at the debate that ensued in the attempts to domesticate the Child Rights Act (CRA) in 2003 (Toyo, 2006).

In 1991, Nigeria ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) only to domesticate the Act, CRA, 13 years later, in 2003. A significant limitation was Nigeria's Constitution, which placed the child protection issue in the state region. Some states, especially the Northern states, opposed the Act (Toyo, 2006). The fundamental problem was the section in the CRA that stipulated a minimum age of marriage. Therefore, taking from that experience, an issue that arises when ensuring gender equality is that “the normative assumption that flow from the adoption of any international human rights treaty is that it will guarantee rights for people alike” (Toyo, 2006). The Lack of Substantive Unified Women's Movement is another centrifugal force.

When you compare the achievement of women in Chile to their Nigerian counterparts, Okeke-Ihejirika and Franceschet (2002) alleged that the significant difference appears to be a unified women's movement.

5.2.1. Lack of Education

Mrs Ifeoma Nzogbo, a government worker, believes that education plays a prominent role in the advancement of women in Politics. Illiteracy is one of the major problems facing Nigerian women despite the efforts made in the educational sector (Okediran et al., 2006). If women in Nigeria must actively take part in politics, then we must address their educational needs. Education is fundamental not only to employment but to various other opportunities as it advances the living conditions of people in Nigeria; its access remains unequal for men and women (Mberu, 2007).

5.2.2. Socio-Economic Resources

Some scholars have attributed it to lower access to socio-economic resources. That is the tendency for men to gain full-time employment than women, and employment intertwines with political participation (Schlozman et al., 1994, 1999). Nussbaum (2002), Nigerian women are under-represented in the public domain compared with the male counterparts with outcomes observed by Nussbaum (2002) wherein there is an emergence of a new social underclass.

Similarly, Lama (2001), Banerjee (2003); Bird (2003); Jacquette (1997) have documented strategies that caused the erasure of “femininity” within politics. Women hold ‘soft’ positions like health and education, while males dominate areas such as finance and international trade, creating an imbalance between males and females. (Peterson and Runyan, 1993) Social Cleavages in Nigeria that act as barriers to women’s participation in politics include, but are not limited to, culture, religion, class, etc.

5.2.3. Cultural Cleavage

One respondent, Mrs Hephzibah Blessing, an accountant, described the forces against women participation in politics, especially in Delta State in South-South Nigeria. The culture perceived women as being wild when they participate in politics. Therefore, culture impedes women’s political participation in Nigeria. In the African tradition, Men are the decision-makers at home and in politics, while women’s role is to cook in the kitchen. An example was the case of Dorothy None when she announced her intention to represent the Gokana area for the ruling People’s Democratic Party (Frontline Women, 2007).

Traditional norms place women as kitchen dwellers and their position as second to that of men. Mrs Ifeoma Nzogbo added that conventional values had relegated women to the background. The culture receives the birth of a male child with joy, making the women and society feel insecure in their marriage until they give birth to male children. These cultural practices are often harmful to women, especially when women during burial rites in the eastern parts of the country remain social outcasts: Igbafe & Offiong, (2007). It forces suspected widows to drink the bathwater of their dead husbands as part of the mourning process.

In the Northern part of the country, early marriages of teenage girls are welcome: neglecting the health consequences in these teenagers result in Vesicovaginal fistula (VVF). An abnormal fistulous tract extends between the bladder and the vagina, allowing the continuous involuntary

discharge of urine into the vaginal vault. Besides, we expect marriage and parenthood to have a more substantial negative effect among women than among men, where marriage may even boost participation (Rotolo, 2000). Moreover, once married, women's leisure time declines to a greater extent than men's, and women increase the time spent on housework, whereas men's contribution decreases: Gupta, (1999), Sayer (2005). Thus, marriage might lower political participation among women and boost it among men (Rotolo 2000).

5.2.4. Religious Cleavage

Religion is an accomplice in the stereotyping of Nigerian women and reinforces the barriers that prevent them from participating politically, economically, and socially. For instance, in the northern part of Nigeria, women depend on their husbands to meet their needs. In addition, religion is a barrier for women taking part in politics (either as voters or as aspirants to elective offices), legitimising male dominance. (Para-Mallam, 2006). Although both males and females in Nigeria have equality under the Nigerian constitution, Para-Mallam maintained that this is merely in principle as native laws and customs affect women at all levels of society.

On a positive note, research shows that religiosity and religious affiliation impact civic skills (Putnam 2000). On average, women who are more likely to be religious in church activities or mosque attendance has a more substantial positive effect on men's political engagement than women in Nigeria. Mustapha, (2006).

5.2.5. Class Cleavage

The disparities in the political participation of men and women are because of resources, political attitudes, and gender roles. For example, women's lower average levels of socio-economic resources may make it more difficult for them to engage in time-intensive, expensive, or highly skilled forms of activity, such as campaigning for a candidate Burns, (2007) Lister, (2003) Paxton et al., (2007). Women may find it easier to participate in daily activities that do not stress them (Stolle et al., 2005). Women prefer to participate in less visible and formal activities than to be in the limelight. Lister, (2003) Lovenduski, (1998) Risman, (1998).

6. Impact of Social Cleavages on Women Political Participation in Nigeria

Political participation is an essential component required for ensuring the stability and legitimacy of every political system (Kumari & Kidwai). According to Agbaje (1999), it is an

integral part of democracy because democracy involves a commitment to equal opportunity for men and women to develop their capacities (Anifowoshe, 2004). Thus, democracy is inconceivable without political participation (Agbaje, 1999:193). The political power that women or any group of persons in society have would link directly to the degree of their participation in the political process of that society (Lewu, 2005:63).

The African continent presumes that politics for the men despite being a patriarchal society. However, Nigeria has a rich history of women breaking out of the mould to participate in politics. The examples of Queen Amina of Zaria that led armies to drive out invaders from Zaria, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, a crusader and challenger of despotic leaders, who led Egba women on a protest over taxation. Margaret Ekpo, a prominent civil rights activist, Hajia Gambo Sawaba, who championed the cause of the oppressed in northern Nigeria and Iyalode Tinubu of Lagos, exemplifies the rich participation of women in the economic scene. These women's legacies are at risk of extinction through an increasing number of women are finding their way into boardrooms and providing leadership for blue-chip companies. However, most women in Nigeria only minimally take part in economic development or politics. Female participation in decision-making is still a far cry from the Rwandan experience, where the economic road to recovery is on the backs of women.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study explained the impact of social cleavages on women's political participation in Nigeria. As the findings confirmed, social cleavages such as culture, religion, and others serve as a bane to the level of the involvement of women in politics. Women are still under-represented in the political administration of Nigeria, representing only a small percentage of national legislators and others in public office. This study was essential to address gender inequality based on women's experiences in Nigeria: Women, if empowered to do so, can contribute to the development of Nigeria in more meaningful ways than they currently can contribute.

Compared to men, women's rights and freedom are limited, creating and promoting a culture that primarily gives women domestic responsibilities. This limitation has made it difficult for women to enjoy equal education opportunities, find leadership and power outside the home, and otherwise take part politically. Women's equality needs development and reinforcement, and that opportunity lives in the public sphere.

Recommendations

For women to actively participate in politics in Nigeria, women need to:

- Be bold and take their rightful position, not just at the home front, knowing that the game of politics is played better by both genders.
- Support women, and it should be the slogan of women in Nigeria “women support women”.
- Create awareness in the rural areas in the form of enlightenment programmes.

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