WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA. IS THE PATRIARCHAL NATURE OF NIGERIA A FACTOR?

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Abstract
Patriarchy is used to explain vast social structures in which men dominate over women and children. It is often expanded to a diversity of expression in which men have social privileges over others introducing exploitation and oppression such as male control of moral authority and control of property. The Nigerian society is patriarchal and this has been demonstrated through the social, legal, political, religious and economic organizations across the country. Women are tacitly discriminated against and discouraged from political participation, that is, standing as candidates in election or holding political offices through a wide range of patriarchal ideology which are promoted by men. This work identifies structural categories by which patriarchy impedes women political participation in Nigeria. The prospects and benefits of women political participation are also identified. Secondary data were collected for the study. The study argues that without increased women participation in politics and governance, it will be difficult to achieve transparent, accountable and participatory government that can ensure political, cultural, social and economic priority goals of the wider society. The work suggests that women economic empowerment should be encouraged. Quota system should be adopted as a measure to increase the number of women in politics.

Introduction

Women political participation has been noted as a measurement of the standing or position of women in any society. Consequently, women's political participation has received unprecedented attention since the women decade (1975 - 85). Many international conferences have been organized to address women political and economic empowerment, one took place in Mexico City in 1975 and coincided with the 1975 International Women's Year, Copenhagen, Denmark in 1980, Nairobi, Kenya in 1985 and the Beijing conference of 1995 (UN Women, 2019). Kassa (2015) avers that the participation of women in political decision making was recognized as a political right after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. Its Articles 2 and 21 impose equal possession of political rights without discrimination on the basis of sex or on any other ground. Same way, in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution Article 15(2) and Article 42(1) (a) and (b), (2) and (3) forbid discrimination on the basis of sex (www.fao.org>) national-legal-framework). But sadly, Nigerian women are under-represented in decision making opportunities. Democracy presumes that all participate in the management of public affairs. Women marginalization in politics is noted to be a global problem. For instance, based on the 2019 United Nations (UN Women, 2019) Report, globally, women occupy only 24.3% of the National Parliaments. The Report further observes that about 38 countries have less than 10% of their women in the parliament. Globally, only 17% of Cabinet Ministers are women. In Nigeria, women are also disproportionately marginalized in politics. For instance, the National Assemblies are dominated by men, in 1999, only 2.8% of Senators were women, in 2007, it increased to 3.6%, in 2011, it further increased to 8.5% in 2015 and reduced to 6.6% in 2019 (Ohaju et al, 2022). In the House of Representatives in 1999, only 3.3% of the members were women, in 2003 6.3%, 7.2% in 2007, they were also 7.2% in 2011 and 3% in 2019 ((Ohaju et al, 2022). In the recent 2023 elections, out of 423 National Assembly seats, women got only 15 seats representing 3.5% (Raji, 2023). Nigeria has never elected a female President or female Governor.

A system where all participate equally in decision making enhances legitimacy of the government and ensures that the government is responsive to the yearnings of all segments of the society. Patriarchy is a skewed power relation between men and women that champions male superiority. Patriarchy presumes a domesticated and sedentary role for women. Salaam (2003) opines that patriarchy defends women's marginalization in the economy, education, labour market, politics, business, family and in inheritance. The unequal power relationship between men and women affects

women adversely as it affects their workings politically, socially and economically. Women's lack of economic and political resources make it difficult for them to compete with men for political positions. Women's participation in politics could boost economic development. This is because when women earn more money, a significant part of the money is spent on the education, health, housing and food of all members of the family. Mutume (2004) rightly observes that increased women political empowerment is reflected by an increase in the investment, savings and income of the family and consequently contributing to the economic growth of the country. When women participate in governance, they advocate for laws that will benefit the women and the entire population, thus ensuring that all benefit from the system. Examples include the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) in Nigeria, which was passed in 2015 and first introduced as gender - based violence bill, gender - based bill in Rwanda in 2006 and the Sexual Offence Law in Kenya in 2006 (Konte, 2020), which were all advanced by female politicians.

This study identifies structural categories by which patriarchy impedes women political participation in Nigeria. The prospects and benefits of women's political participation were also identified.

Literature Review

Political participation refers to deliberate activities embarked upon by the masses to control public policy either directly or by influencing the selection of persons who make policies. Political participation refers to a wide range of activities through which people express their opinions and participate or take part in decisions that affect them. Deth (2016) sees political participation as the citizen's engagement affecting politics. He further outlines the features of political participation to include first, it is an activity, second, it is voluntary, third, it refers to the activities of the citizens in their role as non – professionals and fourth it relates to the government, politics and the State. Lam (2003) sees political participation as lawful or unlawful engagements aimed at supporting, making demands, debates and other forms of expressions communicated either verbally or through the media that are directed to the Government. Bergstrom (2019) notes that the activities involved in political participation include voting, attending political meetings, engaging in political debates, contributing financially to political processes, seeking political information and communicating with political representatives. He also sees the more active forms of political participation to include registration as a member of a party, speech making and writing, canvassing and registering voters, campaign and standing as candidates

during election. Lewu (2005) submits that political participation involves diversity of ways in which people exercise to have an effect over the political process. Patriarchy is a social system in which positions of control, benefit and advantage are primarily held by men. It is a system of relationships, assumptions and values rooted in political, social and economic systems that structure gender inequality between men and women. Features seen as "Feminine" or relating to women are underestimated while attributes regarded as "Masculine" are indulged or privileged.

Improved women political participation is an essential ingredient for attaining gender equality and women empowerment. Brollo and Troiano (2016) note that women political empowerment could encourage economic development because they tend to support provision of essential social services. Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) point out that women are likely to be more involved in the activities going on in the community and even voice their concerns when women hold leadership positions in their community. According to a study by the European Union (2016), women in governance tend to advocate that more resources are channeled to education, health and human rights issues. Dufflo (2012) maintains that women will bring women issues to the front burner and advance different policy priorities that will improve the life of all in the society. O'Neil and Domingo (2015) rightly opine that when women are in governance, they tend to favour families and will work to support families and children. All these point out that women political empowerment is very necessary for development. Grown et al (2005) surmise that increased women participation in governance will lead to improvement in the quality of the institutions of government and also encourage growing trust among the population. Arguing in the same vein, Dollar et al (2001) had earlier pointed out that the participation of women in politics and governance will help to lessen the level of corruption. Fox and Lawless (2004) see political socialization as one of the factors limiting women's political participation as people are socialized to believe that men are more suited to hold public offices. Shvedock (2002) submits that women's economic and social status influence their participation in politics. Encouraging women economic empowerment is very essential in expanding the number of women in political position. Afolabi and Arogundade (2003) rightly pin point the imperative of women political participation, they note that politics is a crucial setting for decision making. The distribution of scarce resources is left in the discretion of politicians. Politicians make choices that may benefit some individuals at the detriment of others. Adeniyi (2003) sees violence and electoral disputes perpetuated by men as one factor inhibiting women's political participation. Hooge and Stolle (2004) argue that women shy away from politics because of the apathy thesis and inhibition thesis. The

apathy thesis postulates that women shy away from participating in politics because they are innately not interested in politics, while the inhibition thesis points out that women are interested in politics but are restricted by some restraints or circumstances. Arguing further, they aver that gender roles and rules barring women from participation in politics are some of the inhibitions that have kept women away from politics.

Burns (2002) notes that there are four possible reasons women shy away from politics. First, she identifies that women have fewer skills, such as speaking in public, writing texts and chairing meetings. She stresses that men are more likely to get jobs that will increase or build their civic skills, build their confidence and prepare them to be involved in politics. Second, Family life tend to reduce the time available to women to pursue other things including engaging in politics. Third, childrearing responsibilities might affect them especially when their children are still very young. Fourth, is the way gender roles limit the forms of political action they should engage in. Patriarchy has remained a major feature of developing countries including Nigeria. Nnorom (2006) rightly surmises that men create patriarchy because of their desire to dominate women politically and economically. It is a system of male authority which suppresses women through its social, economic and political institutions.

Theoretical Underpinning
This study used Patriarchal theory as the theoretical framework. The theory is closely associated with Sir Robert Filmer. He wrote a book titled Patriarcha before 1653, which was not published until after his death. Patriarchy is a social system in which positions of authority and privilege are primarily occupied by men. According to the Marxist theory, patriarchy originated as a result of the advent of private property, which was conventionally controlled by men. Men sought to control women by limiting their work to sedentary kind of life, where they stay at home, give birth to children and take care of the family. Men do this to ensure that they pass their property to their male children. The works of Aristotle characterized women as morally, intellectually and physically inferior to men and he saw men's domination of women as natural (Walby, 1992). Arguing further, he stresses that the responsibility of women in the society is to procreate and to serve men at home. Patriarchy is a social system where men dominate in every facet of life. It is a social system where men have social privileges over others and introduce exploitation and oppression. It forms patriarchal ideology that is used to support men dominance as due to natural differences and divine commandment.

The average Nigerian women are perceived as instruments to be used for

15

prostitution, full time housewife, forced marriages and also for human trafficking. It is appropriate for this study because it depicts the reason Nigerian women shy away from politics. Nigeria is a patriarchal society that see women as inferior and therefore should be under men. This has translated in the public spaces where women are considered to be seen and not heard. The next section will identify structural categories by which patriarchy impedes women political participation in Nigeria.

The Structural Categories by Which Patriarchy Impedes Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

- **Patriarchal Cultural Structure**: The culture of the Nigerian State has perpetually kept women in inferior position. Some of the cultural practices include widowhood rites, female genital mutilation, child marriage, denial of inheritance rights etc. The girl - child is socialized to believe that the brothers are superior to her, encouraging the denigration of the female gender. Nigerian women also contribute to perpetuate patriarchy by not questioning the patriarchal institutions that oppress them. By believing that it has always been done this way and it will continue like this. This affects their psyche and also affects how they think and behave in the public spaces. Women also pass this psyche to their female children. The girl child is therefore brought up with the social norms that are approved by men. Nigerian women lack confidence and find it difficult to aspire to public offices. For instance, during the recent 2023 Elections, out of a total of 15,307 candidates that contested election under the 18 registered parties, 13, 754 were men representing 89.8%, whereas only 1,553 were women representing 10.1% (Zagi, 2023). The patriarchal society sets frameworks for women's unequal positions in the family, political parties and the society. They also set the parameters of how politics should be played and what should be the role of women. They do not appoint women to positions of power within party structures. Due to patriarchy, men set rules for the game of politics, these rules many times debar women from participating in politics. Rules such as fixing party meetings at night or in the hotels, charging exorbitant fees as party nomination fees etc. Women in politics are expected to interact

with both male and female constituents and hold public meetings but our cultural norms do not support that women should play such roles. The cultural inclination or notions of female passivity, meekness, untaintedness or purity and submissiveness conflict with the type of roles that politicians play. All these are set by the patriarchal society to inhibit women political participation.

- **Patriarchal Socio – Economic Relations:** Economic relations here implies women's financial status. Early marriage affects a girl child's economic empowerment because it affects her ability to attend school or acquire skills that could make her to be financially independent. Early marriage of the girl – child is still prevalent in Nigeria as a result of the patriarchal philosophy. A girl – child can be given out in marriage at a young age without acquiring education or skills, as some of them will have to drop out from school in order to get married. This affects their self –development, economic empowerment and their ability to engage in politics. Atkeson (2003) rightly maintains that differences between men and women in political resources like education, income and self – confidence contribute to their differences in political participation. Nigerian women dominate in the informal sector as petty traders, casual workers, unpaid workers in family businesses, paid workers in informal business, street hawkers and they represent one of the weakest group in the economy. Nigerian women are attracted to the informal sector because it requires little or no education and because of flexibility of time. Arum and Eze (2022) rightly aver that people working in the informal sector earn very low income, they lack the privilege for self - development and also face social exclusion. To be involved in Nigerian politics, one has to be wealthy. Nomination forms during the build up to the 2023 general election were very exorbitant. The ruling party which is the All Progressive Congress (APC) sold their Presidential nomination form as high as 100 million naira, which is equivalent of 117,647.059 dollars while the main opposition party, Peoples Democratic Party now sold theirs for 40 million naira, which is the equivalent of 47,058.823 dollars (Edeme, 2022). This, tactically debarred many

17

women from standing as candidates in elections because they did not have money to purchase nomination forms. Apart from money for nomination forms, to contest the primary elections and then the main elections means more money. The poor economic base of many Nigerian women has equally orchestrated various forms of abuse from husbands of their wives (Arum and Adefisoye, (2017). Because these women are not economically empowered, they endure many forms of deprivation because they are totally dependent on their husbands. These women therefore depend on their husbands to tell them who to vote for or whether they should engage actively in politics.

- **Patriarchy and Gender Roles**
Through patriarchy, women are assigned gender roles in the society, they are confined to the homes as care givers, wives, mothers, domestic workers and home makers whereas men feature in the public spaces. These roles affect them in life because it gives them dual responsibilities, they have to juggle home work and their paid employment. This affects the time available to do other things including involving in politics. Philips (1991) and Okin (1989) cited in Hooge and Stolle (2004) observe that women have fewer resources when compared with men in income, time, education and civic skills. They stressed that child rearing activities limit women's time and discourage them from political participation. The public space is viewed as men's preserve, Nigerian women have to therefore negotiate their entrance and claims into public spaces. This is one factor limiting women's political participation.

- **Patriarchy and Women's Human Rights Violation:** Women suffer various forms of abuse because of their gender. They are victims of acid bath, widow abuse, murder, rape and physical assaults. Women also face abuses like female genital mutilation, wife battery, sexual harassment, incest and emotional abuse. Sadly, these forms of abuse are not considered a problem by the police and the State. Many of these violations are considered as private affairs which the state is not supposed to interfere with. It is only when the woman dies in the process of the abuse that the State will try to look into it. Due to

patriarchy, women are considered as the private property of men, who can treat them as they deem fit. Formal means to seek redress in cases of domestic violence are usually fruitless (Arum and Adefisofe, 2017). The violation of women's rights encourages debasement of the female gender and affects their economic, social and even political engagement in the society.

Benefits of Women Political Participation

- When higher number of women participate in decision making processes or governance, it leads to greater attention to women issues. This ensures that decision makings are participatory, reactive, impartial and all – inclusive
- Increased women political participation will ensure the productivity and accountability of the public sectors in the country
- Having a good number of both women and men in decision making organs will widen the perspectives, increase inventiveness and innovation, increase the pool of talents and at the same time reduce conflict and refine decision making processes
- Improved women political participation is very beneficial to the country because they can prioritize policies that will improve the lives of all in the society. They include quality education, health, housing, social justice and family feeding. For instance, Nkeiruka Onyejeocha, a female House of Representative member who served in 2007 and was re – elected in 2015 and 2019 moved bills that were geared towards improvement of the lives of ordinary citizens. She also sponsored other bills that could benefit all in the society like the National Youth Service Corps Act (Amendment) bill in 2019, Psychiatric Hospitals Management Act (Amendment) bill, Peoples Bank of Nigeria Act (Repeal) Bill, National Eye Centre Act (Amendment) bill etc (Eke, 2022). Mrs Oluremi Tinubu also sponsored a bill titled Lagos State Special Economic Assistance Programme (Establishment) bill. Senator Aishatu Dahiru, a female Senator who represented Adamawa Central Senatorial District, sponsored the bill for the establishment of Modibo Adama University of Technology Bill in 2019.

- Increased women political participation is a roadmap to efficient and successful democratic institutions, good laws and sustainable peace and stability.

- Due to women's traditional roles as mothers and caregivers in their communities, they tend to be more responsive to constituency needs and pay more attention to issues of community concerns. For instance, Hon. Sunmonu Monsurat, a female Senator who represented Oyo Central Senatorial District between 2015 – 2019, moved a motion in the National Assembly where she called on the Federal Government to instruct medical institutions to remove all the bureaucracy of paper work in the hospitals and attend to accident and gunshot victims immediately (Eke, 2022). The bill was passed in December 2017 by Former President, Muhammadu Buhari. She also sponsored a bill on Tertiary Education grant, known as The Tertiary Education Trust Fund Act (Amendment) Bill (2018) etc.

- Women suffer disproportionately during armed conflict and they often canvass for stabilization, restoration and the prevention of armed conflict. For instance, Senator Uche Ekwunife, a female Senator who represented Anambra Central Senatorial District in the ninth Assembly, called for the decentralization of the Nigerian Army University, Biu, Borno State. She stressed that decentralizing the University will encourage development, decrease crime rate and encourage peaceful co – existence in all the six geo – political zones.

- Increased women participation in politics will ensure that the question of legitimacy of the Government in power is guaranteed as the people can claim ownership of the process and the outcome.

Prospects for Women Political Participation in Nigeria
Considering what the country stands to benefit as a result of gender equality in political participation, there is need to encourage women political empowerment. There is need for the society to challenge patriarchy and all the institutions using it to marginalize women. Patriarchal division of labour

in the home should be interrogated and abolished. Domestic work should be included in the computation of GDP and it should be remunerated. Discrimination against women employment should be confronted and eradicated. Cultural practices that debase women such as widowhood practices, wife inheritance and female genital mutilation should be abolished. Monetisation of politics should be looked into and controlled. Practices that elevate or advance son preference should be eradicated. Female education should be promoted and encouraged. Stereotypes in bringing up male and female children should be challenged through the socialization process. Domestic violence should be criminalized and stiff penalties should be meted out for offenders. Quota system should be introduced as a measure to increase the number of women in governance.

Conclusion

Women representation in politics and political offices holding in Nigeria has been minimal since independence. Their participation in public policy making has also been minimal. A situation where Nigerian women who make up about half of the Nigerian population are sidelined and they are exposed to economic, political, legal and social marginalization spell doom for our democracy. Women political participation is a human right because both men and women have the right to be involved in taking decisions that will define or affect their lives. Women's interest and concerns are usually different from those of men so they should be given the opportunity to include their perspectives or opinions at all levels of decision making. The value system that is common in politics has to change which at the moment exist within male dominated system.

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