

SOCIO-CULTURAL DETERMINANTS ON VOTING PATTERNS IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION IN GOMBE STATE

By

Umar, Ado

Department of Political Science, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State
adoumaru1900@gmail.com (08030955879)

Salihu, Ibrahim

Department of Political Science, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State
ibrahimsalihu375@gmail.com (08161720350)

Onyekachi, Jude Onwuanibe

Department of Political Science, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State
onyekachi_jude@yahoo.com (08033285210)

Aaron, Mijinyawa

Department of Political Science, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State
aaronmijinya@gmail.com (08136325602)

Abstract

Nigeria has played a lip service to the gender equality and women empowerment agenda. Hence, Nigerian women have continued to face a mirage of dehumanizing socio-cultural and religious practices as well as barriers to full participation in the public sphere especially in national government and party politics; in order to address the issues identified therefore, there is need to understand the socio-cultural determinants of voting patterns in Nigeria and Gombe state in particular with a gender lens. This study is therefore aimed at providing insights into this critical area of socio-cultural issues of voting and political processes. It intensively assessed the overall voting patterns with special reference to women involvements as voters and candidates, and the challenges and impact of overall socio-cultural determinants on voting, parties' nominations and support from both formal and informal authorities. Methodologically, both primary and secondary sources of data were employed in the study. The primary sources include field work that involved interview with some selected Key Informants (KIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with selected stakeholders. It also includes the administration of structured questionnaires to the target population. The secondary source of data involved data collection through literature assessment on. This study employed multi-stage sampling technique. A total of 1,100 questionnaires were administered in the state. At first stage, the three senatorial districts of the state were identified. At the second stage, one local government each is selected randomly from the three senatorial district of the state; totaling three in all.

Keywords: Socio-cultural, voting, women, representation

Introduction

For most of Nigeria's history, women's place has been in the home, in the farm or in the field except where the power is. Women have been excluded from the decision making-making levels of political parties and from all levels of government of Nigeria. Women's political participation is a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and genuine democracy. It facilitates women's direct engagement in public decision-making and is a means of ensuring better accountability to women.

Women are conspicuously absent from all branches of government, but their absence from the National Assembly is most offensive. Women, who constitute 49.4% of the population and 51% of the electorates, are only 3.06% of the House of Representatives and 8% of the Senate; women's candidature is only 11.06% of the total seats available

There is progress in women participation all over the world. As of 2015, women in every country in the world have the right to vote; the first nation to grant female suffrage was New Zealand in 1893, and the last country was Saudi Arabia in 2015. Today, many countries are led by females and some countries, such as Finland also have a cabinet dominated by women. These achievements have been possible in large part thanks to gender equality measures. In the Arab region where progress has been slowest, the adoption of quotas by 12 countries helped increase the percentage of women in parliaments from 10 to 18 percent from 2012 to 2017.

But progress is slow and uneven. Women are still underrepresented in politics, parliaments and public life. Women made up less than 23 percent of parliamentarians, with an average of 18 percent in the Arab region, while men make up more than 77 percent, leaving a more than 50 percent gender gap. Attitudes towards women candidates are still largely characterized by deeply ingrained stereotypes and political opponents will often use those stereotypes to question women's capabilities.

Women are about half of Nigeria's population, they make important contributions to economic life and play crucial roles in all spheres of society but largely unacknowledged. In spite of Nigeria's long history of political activities very few Nigerian women have held political offices, either elected or appointed. Likewise women are wanting on issues such as voting, participation in partisan politics, aspiring elective positions and involvement in National decisions making, which suggests that affirmative action in favour of women has not been given adequate attention. Hence across the nation, women are under-represented in active participation in partisan politics; and for sustainable development to occur in Nigeria, women must be given the opportunity to take active part in governance, this will be in compliance with the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), Beijing Convention and the 35% Federal Government of Nigeria affirmative action (Agbalajobi, 2018). This affects women's power in influencing the nation's public policies. And by their demographic advantage women have the capacity to decide on the political leadership. But very few women emerge to the leadership positions of political parties and even fewer become party candidates for electoral contests. This study is a modest attempt to understand the factors that hindered women participation in politics and related activities in Gombe state.

Literature Review

Voting is a formal indication of a choice between two or more candidates or courses of action expressed typically through a ballot or a show of hands. Voting is one of the most fundamental aspects of civic engagement. Many political scientists link voting with the vibrancy of the democratic process and argue that declining voting rates may be indicative of a "democratic deficit". Because political participation can also influence public policy, others are concerned that lower participation could result in policies that are not necessarily representative of key constituencies like those who tend to vote less frequently. As a result the voter turnout rate is used as one indicator of civic engagement. Voting is also the key mechanism of consensus building in a democratic society (Lipset, 1960). Voting behaviour is a set of personal electoral activities, including participation in electoral campaigns, turnout at the polls, and choosing who to vote. Understanding voters' behaviour can explain how and why decisions were made either by public decision-makers, which has been a central concern for political scientists (Goldman: 1966). Through the voting behaviour we can know the will of the people and the way they want to have it. Voting defined by Universal Declaration of Human Right as " is the

fundamental right of all citizens over the age of eighteen". Voting is the expression of a person's preference for a candidate or a group of candidates' as well as the person's preference of one political system rather than the other (Blais et al, 2004). The analysis of voting pattern focused on determinants such as, why people vote and how they make decisions. Social scientists look at the socio-economic determinants such as support of political parties, occasions, ethnicity and gender, correlation between the classes, age and vote. Others are political programmes, electoral campaign, issues and popularity of leaders of the political parties contesting elections" (Leadnum, 2006).

Political participation on the other hand, refers to the variety of ways in which people try to exercise influence over political process. The ultimate aim of political participation is to acquire political power and influence. The electorate is expected to take part in political decisions affecting lived (e.g. voting) through the parties' clarification of issues and provision of indispensable information on politics and current events and candidates for political office. There seems to be a close interrelationship between participating in a political process and actually holding some political power, although there cannot be any power without participation. Milbraith (1965:18), offer a hierarchical model of political participation, which shows the levels of political participation in descending order: holding party and public office, being a candidate for office, soliciting political funds, attending a caucus or strategy meeting, becoming an active member of a party contributing time to political campaigns, attending a political meeting or rally, etc. In the context of Nigeria's experience with political parties, female political participation is very minimal. This is largely due to the fact that political participation is characterized by a high degree of exclusion of women supporters who do not determine the real direction of the party politics ((Akanke, 2002)).

According to Awolowo and Aluko (2010), the essence of political participation in any society, either civilized or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and to influence decision making. Political participation is a means of contributing ones quota to the political system and overall development of the nation. Political participation is one of the fundamental requirements of democratic governance. This is the reason why Adelekan (2010) emphasized that ideally, democracy means individual participation in the decisions that involves one's life. In a democratic system, there is the necessity for the citizenry to be fully involved in the democratic procedures of the choice of rulers and effective communication of the public policies and attitudes. Any claim to democratic regime must essentially embrace a high degree of competitive choice, openness, and enjoyment of civic and political liberties and political participation that involves all groups of the society (Awolowo and Aluko, 2010).

The extents to which people participate in the political system differ from person to person. Falade (2008) identified six types of political participants. Namely; The inactive: these are the people that take no part in any political activity. Voting specialists: These are the people that get eagerly engaged only in voting. Besides voting, they are not concerned about other political activities. Parochial participants: those that participate in politics occasionally. They vote or get involved in any political activity only when it affects their personal interest. The communalist: These are those who get engaged in voting regularly they also get involved in community affairs but they are not involved in political campaign activities. The campaigners: they are actively involved in political campaign but inactive in other community affairs. Complete activists: They are highly involved in all political activities. They actively participate in voting, political campaign, community activities and make contacts with public affairs.

Objectives of the study

The objective of this study is to identify those socio-cultural factors which promotes or constraints women's participation and representation in Nigerian politics, with focus on Gombe

state. Some of the factors cited include traditional values and belief systems, religious doctrines, patriarchy, lack of resources, lack of support and male domination in politics.

Conceptual Framework

Elections considers as the major political events of the political system which shape the political behavior. Voting behavior is a form of political behavior. Understanding voters' behaviour can explain how and why decisions were made either by public decision-makers or other bodies, which has been a central concern for political scientists (Goldman, 1966). Through the voting behaviour we can know the will of the people and the way they want to have it. The study of voting behaviour related to learning about the nature of political system and provides information about the process of political system. Voting is the main form of political participation in a democratic society and its study in political science is highly specialized in the sub-fields (Cohen, 2003). The registered citizens are only eligible to cast their vote. The analysis of voting pattern focused on the determinants such as, why people vote and how they make the decisions. Sociologists look at the socio-economic determinants such as support of political parties, occasions, ethnicity and gender, correlation between the classes, ages and vote (Leadnum, 2006). "While political scientists focused on the influence of voting behavior of political factors such as political programmes, electoral campaign, issues and popularity of leaders of the political parties contesting elections" (Chuku, 2011).

Methodology

a) Purpose of Research

This study mainly has an exploratory research purpose since it aims to gain a deeper understanding of women participation in politics. As this is a complex topic an explanatory research is used to clarify this complex subject. However, this study is also descriptive, as it answers the question of how women participate in politics.

b) Research Approach

There are two main research approaches to choose from, either a qualitative or a quantitative. The main differences between these two are the assumptions they are build on (Yin, 2003). The quantitative research design refers to measurements by data collection and statistical facts, (Davidson & Patel, 2006). In general the quantitative analysis answers the "how question". In the qualitative research design the data collection is based on "soft" data, for example in form of qualitative interviews. The qualitative approach tends to be more exploratory and is concerned about gaining in-depth understanding of a subject or an event. Qualitative research tends to answer the "why" questions, Angela (2021). This study will however use mixed methods to gather data. This approach not only collects and analyzes existing data in the development of new ideas/theories; it also observes trends and gradually builds them towards a general pattern.

c) Sources of the Data

In this study data and information are mainly collected from the primary source namely, through field survey that involved interview schedules conducted with some selected Key Informants in the study area. These key informants are officials of the Ministry of Women affairs, Ministry of Youth Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation, traditional rulers, Legislators, Political parties' officials and politicians. Focus Group Discussions was also conducted with Adult Female Groups, Female Youth Group, Male Adult Group, Male Youth Group, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSO's) among others in conducting these interviews, tape recorders were used and note-taking was done alongside to record other physical observations of people interviewed. Our primary source of data collection also includes the administration of a structured questionnaire to the target population. The secondary source of data involved data collection through literature assessment

on the subject of inquiry. The study therefore used mixed method and triangulation; triangulation enabled the integration of diverse data sources, methods, and procedures.

d) Sample Design

This study employed multi-stage sampling technique. A total of 1,100 questionnaires were administered in the state. At first stage, the three senatorial districts of the state were identified. At the second stage, one local government each is selected randomly from the three senatorial district of the state; totaling three in all. These senatorial districts are Gombe North, Gombe Central and Gombe South. While Gombe, Akko and Shongom LGAs were selected from the three Senatorial Districts with each serving as urban semi-urban and rural local government.

The quantitative instruments were therefore administered as follows:

- a. 400 questionnaires in Gombe - urban
- b. 350 questionnaires in Akko – semi urban
- c. 350 questionnaires in Shongom – rural

Furthermore, fifty one enumeration area maps (E.A. maps) were used for the identification and selection of households in conducting the exercise. The 51 enumeration area maps were divided as follows:

- a. 20 enumeration area map – Gombe – urban
- b. 18 enumeration area map – Akko – semi-urban
- c. 13 enumeration area map – Shongom– rural

Field workers were used as follows:

Gombe: Five (5)

Akko: Five (5)

Shongom: Four (4)

List of FGDs KII/IDI and Community Dialogue

Gombe: 5 FGDs; 13 KI/IDI; & 1 Gender Audit

Akko: 5 FGDs; 2 KI/IDI, & 1 Gender Audit

Shongom: 3 FGDs; 1 Community Dialogue; 2 KI/IDI& 1 Gender Audit

List of NGOs interacted with

Gombe: 4 NGOs

Akko: 3 NGOs

Shongom: 3 NGOs

Though the number of the survey instruments is small compared to the population of these areas, it is still representative of the total population of the selected areas. The analytical technique adopted for the obtained data were descriptive and quantitative.

The research questions raised for this study were given both qualitative and quantitative analyses.

Qualitative Analysis

The Focus Group Discussion and interview were recorded and transcribed. The report of the interview and discussion generally showed that women participation and representation in politics depends on their efforts towards participation in the electoral process, not only in voting but contesting for a public office. The FGD showed that almost 70% of the participants do not used to cast their votes during general elections. Some of the reasons why they abstained from election were: the thuggery, chaotic and violent situations that characterized the voting centers; distance and no means of transportation; names not found on the voters register and lack of confidence in the electoral process. The report of the FGD also revealed that male participants were more politically conscious than their female counterparts. 65% and 50% of males and females respectfully were aware and could clearly state some of their human rights. Generally more than 70% of the participants had no access to the Nigerian constitution.

Again it was discovered that the participants were not involved in the process of decision making. All the participants responded that they were not involved in decisions that affect their own lives. They also pointed out that even when their opinions were sought, their feelings and needs were not reflected in political and policies. More than 80% of the participants expressed that they had no confidence in the political leaders. They observed that political leaders are corrupt and selfish; they are not honest transparent and trustworthy.

That party politics are characterized by a structure reliant on funding, male domination, and tendency to violence. All these are vices that impede female political participation in politics.

The qualitative data obtained in this study are analysed on the basis of the research questions that were generated as follows:

- I. Will the subjects demonstrate high level of political participation in the democratic process?
- II. I am highly involved in political activities
- III. I vote always
- IV. I play some roles in politics
- V. Nigerian democracy gives room for mass participation of women
- VI. There are stringent conditions required for taking part in Nigerian politics
- VII. My religion and value system are in support of my playing politics
- VIII. Will there be higher level of political participation among male than female members of the community?
- IX. I am highly involved in political activities
- X. Do the people have confidence and trust in their political leaders?
- XI. Political leaders are trustworthy and dedicated to the needs of the community.
- XII. Political leaders usually fulfill their promises after electioneering
- XIII. Political leaders are responsive to the needs of the people.

V. Findings

The findings of this study showed that there was low level of political participation among the sampled respondents. Only 43% of the people were highly involved in political activities. Also, less than half, that is, 30% of the people regularly cast their votes. These findings are corroborated by the qualitative report that the participants merely registered and got voters registration cards. The non-participation of most registered women voters in the 2019 voting exercise in Gombe state is an obstacle to democratic governance.

This political apathy is one of the factors responsible for electoral fraud and manipulations by desperate politicians. For instance, in preparation for electoral fraud during the February 2019 general election, politicians were reported buying up voters' card at the rate of ten thousand naira (₦10,000.00) and above per card. Some of the victims of this dubious act were famished and politically indifferent people. The failure of registered voters to participate in voting exercise during the election is an obstacle to democratic governance. This is because non-participation in the electoral process is a means of installing bad and unpopular leaders.

This study also revealed that there was effect of gender on political participation. More males (70%) than females (30%) were highly involved in political activities. Again, more males (78%) than females (22%) were regularly involved in voting exercise. Other major findings are

1. Politics in Gombe is male dominated.
2. Islamic religious doctrines inhibit women from participating in politics.
3. Female politicians are labeled as prostitutes and irresponsible women.
4. Christians are in the minority group, mainly from Gombe South Senatorial Districts.
5. Women are not allowed to take part in societal decision making.
6. There are only three women out of the twenty two politically appointed commissioners in Gombe state.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

Elections have always been a feature of democratic process. Democratic institutions thrive on the exercise of choice at regular intervals by the electorate. Elections act as a safeguard of democratic freedom and, among other things, make for the rotation of rulers and create the potential for leadership. The important role of women in this process and in the development of any nation cannot be overemphasized. The number of women in the political process tends to be low in comparison to their female counterparts due to socio-cultural factors and therefore, the society and government should take steps to increase the rate of education and awareness among women in this regard. This study revealed that the Nigerian political system and act of governance do not encourage women participation. This is because of factors such as political violence, intimidation, manipulation, and sentiments, money politics, ignorance, corruption, deception, religion, cultural issues, domestic responsibilities and apathy. The involvement of women in the political system is therefore marginal.

On the basis of the findings of this study it is recommended that there is urgent need for political education in Nigeria. Political education should not be limited to the school system. Both formal and informal approaches should be adopted to orientate the citizens on the need for active participation in the political system. There is the need for mass political enlightenment through the media and civil association on the importance of women in politics.

There is also particular need for greater emphasis on girl child education. This will help to erase the traditional gender stereotypes that have affected women's involvement in politics. The women folk need to be intellectually empowered as a means of reducing the problem of gender inequality in the Nigerian society. Girl child education can be promoted through enlightenment campaign and financial support by Governmental and Non-Governmental Agencies. The electoral process should be devoid of sentiment, favoritism, fraud, violence and intimidation.

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