

EFFECT OF SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS AND GENDER DYNAMICS: IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

Hauwa'u, Mainoma Mohammed (Ph.D.)¹, DR. GODIYA Pius² & ONIBON, Felicia Iyore³

^{1,2&3}Centre for Gender Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi

hauwamainoma@yahoo.com¹, godiyapius@nsuk.edu.ng² & feliciaonibon@gmail.com

Abstract:

Women constitute half of world population and contribute immensely to the development of world today. This parity in terms of population has not translated to parity in political leadership in most countries across the globe. This study investigates the effect of socio-cultural factors and gender dynamics on women's political participation in North Central Nigeria. The study used convenience sampling technique to select a sample of four hundred (400) respondents drawn from selected three (3) major LGAs from each of the six (6) north central states making it a total of eighteen (18) LGAs. Five-point Likert scale questionnaire was made into copies and distributed to the respondents. Ordinary least square (OLS) was employed to analyze the data collected. The result revealed that prevailing gender norms and expectations in North Central Nigeria was found to have a positive influence on women's participation and leadership opportunities. The relationship between socio-economic factors like education, financial resources, and networks was also found to have a positive impact on women's political participation and representation in North Central Nigeria. The study therefore recommended among others the advocate for policy reforms that actively promote gender equality in political participation and governance, invest in educational initiatives to empower women, recognizing education as a catalyst for increased political engagement. Implement economic empowerment programs to alleviate poverty, fostering an environment conducive to women's active participation in politics

Keywords: *Gender dynamics, women's political participation, traditional gender roles, cultural norms, societal expectations, political parties.*

INTRODUCTION

Globally, it's important to note that both men and women have equal rights to resources and opportunities. Women constitute half of world population and contribute immensely to the development of world today. This parity in terms of population has not translated to parity in political leadership in most countries across the globe (Adeniyi, 2020).

According to Afolabi (2018), women constitute over half of the world's population and contribute in vital ways to societal development generally. In most societies' women assume five key roles: mother, producer, home-manager, community organizer and socio-cultural and political activists. Of these roles mentioned, the last has been engendered by women movements attributed to historical gender discrimination and inequality. Hitherto the emergence of these movements, gender roles was divided between the male and female sexes. These roles can be broadly classified into- the productive and the reproductive gender roles. Whereas the productive gender roles were mainly associated with the male sex, reproductive gender roles were exclusive to their female counterparts. This societal reality was deeply rooted in the cultural beliefs and values of societies in the world. "...from those societies we might want to call most egalitarian to those which sexual stratification is most marked, men are the locus of cultural value. Some area of activity is always seen as exclusively or predominantly male and therefore overwhelmingly and morally important (Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974)

Women's political participation is essential for achieving inclusive governance and promoting gender equality. However, in many societies, including North Central Nigeria, women face significant barriers and underrepresentation in political spheres. These challenges can be attributed to various socio-cultural factors and gender dynamics that shape women's opportunities and experiences in politics. (Agbalajobi, 2010).

According to Chukwuorji (2021), Socio-cultural factors such as traditional gender roles, cultural norms, and societal expectations play a crucial role in shaping women's engagement in politics. Traditional gender roles often prescribe specific roles and responsibilities for women, limiting their access to political spaces. Cultural norms and societal expectations may reinforce stereotypes and biases that hinder women's political

participation and leadership aspirations (Onyekachi, et al. 2013). Understanding these factors is vital for addressing the challenges faced by women in the political arena. Gender dynamics within political parties also significantly impact women's political participation. Biases and practices within party structures and decision-making processes can create barriers for women, limiting their opportunities for nomination, leadership positions, and meaningful participation. (Wright, 2015). Examining these dynamics is crucial for identifying the structural and institutional factors that perpetuate gender disparities in political representation.

Based on the forgoing, the study was guided by the following research objectives:

- i. To examine the socio-cultural factors that influence women's political participation in North Central Nigeria, including traditional gender roles, cultural norms, and societal expectations.
- ii. To investigate the impact of socio-economic factors, including access to education, financial resources, and networks, on women's political participation and representation in North Central Nigeria.

These objectives were converted into hypotheses which were stated in null form as follows:

Ho₁: Women's political participation in North Central Nigeria does not significantly influence socio-cultural norms and expectations, with traditional gender roles and societal expectations serving as barriers to women's engagement in politics.

Ho₂: Socio-economic factors, including access to education, financial resources, and networks, significantly affect women's political participation and representation in North Central Nigeria, with greater access leading to increased participation and representation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender Dynamics

Gender dynamics as defined by Akabogu et al. (2015) as the social, economic, political, and cultural attributes, perceptions, and opportunities that a society associates with being male or female. Similarly, Risman (2018) and Thompson and Walker (2019) provide insights into how individuals might exhibit different gender dynamic expressions in professional settings compared to personal relationships, pointing to the adaptability and situational dependence of gender roles. This adaptability challenges the notion of gender as a fixed attribute, suggesting instead that it is subject to change and reinterpretation depending on the context.

Social Cultural

According to Chukwuorji (2021), socio-cultural refers to a complex set of meanings, habits, values, and behaviors adopted by one or more social formations. It is also about combining socio-cultural factors of an entity in developmental discourse. Socio-cultural systems in all cultures are determined by the ecological context of their human populations.

Socio-cultural refers to the combination of social and cultural factors that shape and influence individuals, groups, communities, and societies. It encompasses the beliefs, values, norms, customs, traditions, language, symbols, rituals, behaviors, and practices shared by people within a particular society or social group. (Rosaldo et al. 1974)

Women's Political Participation

It is necessary to make a conceptual clarification of the term "political participation" in order to enhance our understanding of the subject matter. Political participation is one of the fundamental ideas of a democratic society and an essential component required for ensuring the stability and legitimacy of every political system (Agbaje, 2019; Kumari and Kidwai, 2019). It is the sine qua non of democracy because democracy involves a commitment to equal opportunity for men and women to develop their individual capacities. Political participation is crucial to the determination of the control of power and the extent to which individual members of society share, take part, or get involved in the life of that society (Agbaje, 2019). It occupies a vital place in democratic governance to the extent that its denial to a substantial part of the population can engender some negative reactions. Thus, democracy is inconceivable without political

participation (Kumari & Kidwai, 2019). However, the focus of this study is on women political participation and this study conceptualized it as the involvement of women in political processes, including voting, running for political office, participating in political campaigns, joining political parties, and engaging in advocacy and activism on political issues.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Women Political Participation

Ismail and Arshad (2019) review the issue of women's participation in decision-making as a means to achieve good governance. Good governance is believed to generate better sustainable development, which can be achieved through gender mainstreaming (gender equality) and women's participation in decision-making as well. Malaysia has used a gender mainstreaming approach to achieve gender equality and good governance. This paper then focuses on women's involvement in decision-making as a case study at two selected ministries. The paper also discusses the implementation of gender mainstreaming approaches in decision-making by decision-makers for both men and women. Data was gathered from interviews with eight respondents holding top management positions at two selected ministries. The result shows that both ministries have women's involvement in the decision-making process, but the implementation of gender mainstreaming approach in the decision-making process is still minimal. Therefore, this paper suggests some solutions to ensure that women's participation and the implementation of gender mainstreaming approach exist in the decision-making processes. Similarly, Suleiman (2017) investigates the factors that limit women's participation in Nigeria's politics using a case study period between 1999 and 2015. Among these factors are socioeconomic development, the country's cultural heritage, historical legacies, and institutional designs. The study employs secondary sources as a method of data collection. The study reveals that the patriarchal system and male domination of society, which relegates women to subordinate roles, has created women's inferiority complexes and alienated them from mainstream politics in Nigeria. The Nigerian political culture of thuggery and gangsters has made the political terrain too dangerous for most women to venture into mainstream politics. Besides, the stigmatization of female politicians by fellow women discourages the political participation of the former, while religious beliefs and institutional arrangements that restrict women to family responsibilities in the country, coupled with a lack of genuine and decisive affirmative action to encourage women's political participation, have created a legacy that limits women's political participation in the country as a whole. Consequently, the study emphasizes the need to address those factors that entrench women's subordination in Nigeria's politics. These include, among others, the reformation of all religious, statutory, and customary laws and practices that perpetuate women's subordination in the country and the explicit specifications and modalities of affirmative actions on women's political participation and clear guidelines for implementation in the Nigeria constitution.

Gender Dynamics within Political Parties that Hindered Women participation

Musa (2019) examines the functions of women in political parties in Ekiti State. The study adopted a qualitative research design in which an in-depth interview was combined with documentary evidence. Primary data was sourced using interviews, while secondary data was sourced from documents such as the Nigerian constitution, the Independent National Commission, and relevant documents from the political parties' websites. Through purposive and snowball sampling techniques, four political parties were selected, and using a semi-structured interview, a total of 13 people within the four political parties were interviewed, along with two focus groups within the four political parties. The study also incorporated relevant literature and theory; the theory of liberal feminism was used in the study. Findings showed that women in political parties in Ekiti State perform roles such as spiritual, mobilizing, and executive ones. Women functions in political parties are both within and outside the parties. Furthermore, the status of women in political parties in Ado Ekiti has not reflected most of the global laws and declarations on women. The result of the study showed that decision-making roles are occupied mostly by men and have experienced a slight increase in the present administration. It also revealed that women have access to financial, economic, and material resources, and these resources are given based on individual choices. Similarly, Akabogu (2016) investigated the reason for the delay in achieving affirmative action in Nigeria. The descriptive survey research method was utilized, with questionnaires as the instrument for data collection. The stratified random sampling technique was adopted in selecting the sample. Two hundred and sixty (260) candidates, both elected and aspiring, at the local and national level from five states in Nigeria were used for the study. The collected

data was analysed using the mean and standard deviation. While analysis of co-variance (ANCOVA) was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 Alpha level of significance. Akabogu found out that affirmative action has been difficult to achieve as men dominate the affairs of politics in the country. The consideration of the above study is relevant to this present study in that it emphasises equitable and reasonable representation of women in politics and decision-making.

Socio-Cultural Factor and Women's Political Participation

Oguadimma, Nwakalor and Ejinkeonye (2021) studied factors militating against women's participation in politics in Enugu State using four communities. The study drawn from three senatorial zones as case study sites. The research approach employed was community familiarisation visits, focus group discussions (FGD), and in-depth interviews (IDI). The FGD comprised women and men leaders in the selected communities who served as the respondents, while in the case of IDI, the selected women community leaders served as the respondents. The study revealed, among other things, that women from the study areas have not been actively involved in politics since the return of democracy in 1999, mainly due to poor finances, a lack of education, a lack of support from fellow women, and an unfavourable political environment. The study thereby recommends different measures to end women's discrimination and intimidation and the creation of a favourable environment for the improvement of women's political participation in Enugu State.

Adeniy (2020) Examining Osun State, women's representation at both the federal and state levels and in the legislative and executive arms of government indicated it has the second highest women's representation in the South West Nigeria. This gives an impression that democracy is being sustained at the grassroots. However, the facts on the ground are to the contrary, especially when compared with their male counterparts and their representation in government. Therefore, this study explores women's political participation and grassroots democratic sustainability in Osun State, Nigeria from 1999 to 2015. This study adopted a survey research design. Data was collected through questionnaires and unstructured interviews. The findings revealed that the number of women involved in political participation in Osun state is low compared to their male counterparts, yet they are beginning to make great strides. It was found that women's representation at the two levels of involvement in the period under study was 50 women, or 20.5% of the group, while male representation was 244, or 79.5%. Further, it was revealed that the underrepresentation of women in political participation in Osun State was due to certain socio-cultural factors like violence, discrimination against women, people's perception of politics as a dirty game, and cultural beliefs. The study conclusions suggest that the representation of women in Osun State is low compared to their male counterparts. This indicates that the sustainability of democracy at the grassroots level is yet to be sustained. It is suggested that there be local policies in place to end all forms of discrimination against women, as well as a platform of action enshrined in the constitution. In addition, the support of organized women's associations not only in training women, but also through financial support and with the assistance of the government, should be encouraged.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the survey research design employing a five-point Likert scale questionnaire and oral interview. This questionnaire was subjected to descriptive statistics, validity and reliability tests using the Cronbach alpha, and the results of the tests were reported in the next section. The population of the study selected from the three (3) major LGAs from each of the six (6) north central states making it a total of eighteen (18) LGAs. The total population of the study area according to the 2006 population census is four million, one hundred and fifteen thousand, five hundred and thirty-three (4115,533) People. Using Taro Yamane (1973) formula to obtain the sample size study therefore adopted a convenience sampling technique to select a sample of four hundred (400) respondents. The study applied the ordinary least square to analyze the data collected from the respondents. The choice of this technique is based on the fact that it is best linear unbiased estimator.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Ordinary Least Square Regression Result

Model	Coefficients ^a				
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.115	.090		1.271	.204
PGNE	.143	.044	.159	3.245	.001
SOEF	.669	.080	.617	8.328	.000

Source: Field Survey, 2024; Computed with SPSS 25

The regression results obtained in table above are interpreted as follows

$$WOPP = .115 + .821GDPP + 669SOEF$$

Where:

WOPP= Women Political Participation (Dependent variable)

PGNE = Prevailing Gender Norms and Expectations

SOEF = Socio-Economic Factors

From the regression result in table above, the results showed that, prevailing gender norms, roles, and expectations has a positive great influence on women's political participation in North Central Nigeria (PGNE), this is evidence from the positive numerical coefficient at the magnitude of .115. This finding was supported by the vast majority (80.4%) of respondents who believed that gender norms indeed have a substantial influence on shaping women's political participation in North Central Nigeria.

The finding also revealed that there is a positive and strong relationship between socio-economic factors, such as access to education, financial resources, networks, and its impact on women's political participation and representation in North Central Nigeria. This was backed by the overwhelming majority (71.2%) of respondents who believe that women from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds indeed face greater barriers to political participation compared to those from more privileged backgrounds in North Central Nigeria.

Test of Hypotheses

Based on the results of the multiple regression presented in Table above, the study verifies the research hypotheses formulated in chapter one in order to accept or to reject them as follows:

Hypothesis One

Considering the p-value for the coefficient of PGNE in table 4.15 which is .001, the study discovered that .001 < .005 level of significance. Therefore, we reject H₀ and conclude that Women's political participation in North Central Nigeria significantly influence socio-cultural norms and expectations, with traditional gender roles and societal expectations serving as barriers to women's engagement in politics.

Hypothesis Two

Considering the p-value for the coefficient of SOEF in table 4.15 which is .000, the study discovered that .000 < .005 level of significance. Therefore, we reject H₀ and conclude that Socio-economic factors, including access to education, financial resources, and networks, significantly affect women's political participation and representation in North Central Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the study revealed that prevailing gender norms, roles, and expectations was found to have a positive and statistically significant influence on women's political participation in North Central Nigeria. This result indicates that traditional gender-related beliefs and practices actually encourage and support women's participation in political activities within this region. there is a level of community support and acceptance for women in politics. This support can manifest in various forms, such as encouragement from

family members, community leaders, or local organizations thereby, overcome barriers to women's political participation in the region.

The relationship between socio-economic factors like education, financial resources, and networks positively impacts women's political participation and representation in North Central Nigeria. These factors empower women, enabling them to engage effectively in politics and assume leadership roles. To enhance women's political involvement, addressing issues related to education, financial independence, and networking is crucial for a more inclusive and representative political system.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

- i. There should be continuity in fostering and promoting these gender norms, roles, and expectations that positively influence women's political participation in North Central Nigeria. This can be achieved through various strategies such as encouraging community and family support for women's political involvement thereby strengthening the existing positive norms and expectations by involving men, women, and youth in advocating for gender equality and women's political participation.
- ii. To enhance women's political participation and representation in North Central Nigeria, focus should be on improving access to education, financial resources, and networking opportunities. Lack of education is the key that often underlies many of the barriers that prevent women from participating in politics, such as limited awareness of political processes, low confidence, and societal expectations. By addressing this root cause, stakeholders can tackle multiple barriers simultaneously.

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