

An Analysis of Women's Electoral Participation in Nigeria's 2011 and 2015 General Elections in Ado-Odo/Ota Local Government Area, Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Globally, women are marginalised and grossly underrepresented in the area of public life where important decisions which affect their lives are taken. Interestingly the trend still persists. The study examined the trend of women's electoral behaviour between 2011 and 2015 using Ado-Odo/Ota Local Government Area of Ogun State as the study area. Descriptive survey design was used with data collected through questionnaire, in-depth and key informant interviews. Findings revealed that women's participation in electoral politics is highly observable only at the spectatorial and transitorial levels. Climbing the electoral ladder and expressing themselves as political gladiators remain difficult for many of them. While women have participated actively in electoral politics, such participation has been as voters and support staff. They are however not rewarded with positions of power in political parties. Political party and legislative gender quotas should be adopted to immediately enhance the attempt of women at becoming political gladiators.

Keywords

Election, electoral behaviour, politics, women

Introduction

Elections have a special position as formal decision-making processes about political office-holders. They are an indicator of the state of a country's democracy (Olurode, 2013). According to Albert (2007), election is widely recognized in extant development literature to play a vital role in the political life of a nation. It is an essential way by which citizens choose their leaders and contribute meaningfully to the identification of the kind of development they desire.

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All groups seek to influence the allocation of scarce values in line with their articulated interests as a fundamental motive of democratic politics. Women constitute half of the world's population and have contributed substantially to the well-being of human race (Anifowoshe and Enemu, 1999). However, their determined efforts to penetrate the public space have been historically resisted not only on cultural grounds alone but also on biological basis. On both grounds, women are denied access to political power and society's significant resources. As a consequence, life chances of men and women differ significantly across societies and even within the same family.

Opinions are divided as to whether the position of women is in the home fronts or women can also engage in socio-economic and political activities like their male counterparts. Victorian ideology states that a woman's place was in the home and that woman should be what God intended, a helpmate for man and that married life is a woman's profession and to this life her training of dependence is modelled (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). The position put forward by the Victorian ideology is that which views women as mechanistic and subjective, one that must always take instructions from the man and never take initiative or question his authority. This perspective has of course concretized the man's hold on political power even in electoral politics where there is free choice of leadership. Many women therefore see themselves as good enough only as voters and not as gladiators in the struggle for power in electoral politics.

Statement of Problem and Research Objectives

The political enfranchisement of women in Nigeria's electoral politics seem to have maintained on the surface, a level of gender equity politically because it is assumed that constitutionally, there are no barriers to women's participation in electoral politics. But what exactly are the problems and prospect women encounter in their quest to participate in electoral politics? The marginalization of women in electoral politics cannot be contested. Most times, they have always had to struggle or wait to be enfranchised.

While women have participated actively in electoral politics, such participation has been as voters, mobilizers, entertainers and support staff. They are however not rewarded with positions of power in political parties and are not given full opportunities to contest for electoral offices. While there is much research available on women's political behaviour, very little is available on women's electoral behaviour and none documented on the study area. It appears that many women are politically apathetic. Those women who participate in electoral politics do so as spectators and only an infinitesimal percentage express their political will as gladiators. The paper therefore examined the trend of women's behaviour from the 2011 to 2015 general elections and suggests measures for improving women's participation as candidates in electoral politics.

Conceptualizing Political and Electoral Behaviour

Political and Electoral Behaviour

Political behaviour is an aspect of politics which deals with the analysis of how and why people get involved in politics (Milbrath and Goel, 1977). According to Eldersveld and Katz (1961), it identifies the behaviour of individuals or group of individuals as the primary unit of analysis. It seeks to examine the behaviour and actions of individuals, rather than characteristics of institutions such as legislature, executive and judiciary.

Election which is central to the discourse on electoral behaviour has been defined in several ways. An election is an official group decision making process by which a population of people chooses who holds a public office. It is the mechanism by which modern representative democracy operates. However, it is important to note that this process is not peculiar to public offices as the practice is well founded in private and business organizations, religious institutions, voluntary organizations and even institutions of learning. In politics, elections are a device whereby popular preferences are aggregated to choose an office holder. Selection by election is now almost inseparable from representative democracy (Okoye, 2014).

Egwu (2007) defined election as one procedure of aggregating preferences of a particular kind, this definition suggests that, elections are an all-embracing mechanism employed to understand people's political wishes and claims. Elections are vital to the very nature of democratic rule. They provide the primary means for ensuring that governments remain responsive and accountable to their citizens. Much though depends on the rules used in these elections (Powell, 2000).

Electoral behaviour in itself refers to the way people overtly comport themselves during electoral politics. It is the way people behave towards election as well as the various factors that affect or determine their behaviours under different circumstances. Different factors including the family, school, peer group, culture, religion, mass media, economy, political parties and pressure group, age and gender shape people's political behaviour (Eesuola *et al.*, 2013).

Women and Electoral Politics in Nigeria

Nigeria's pre-colonial history is crammed with the exploits of great women like Queen Amina of Zaria in the 16th century who was so powerful that she waged war and conquered the whole of Hausa territory. In Yoruba land, Princess Moremi who lived in the second half of the 18th century in Ile-Ife, in one invasion during a war allowed herself to be captured only to learn the fighting strategy of her captors and came back to train her people who later defeated their enemies (Mba, 1982). Oba Orumpoto, the only known Yoruba

female monarch who lived in the 6th century was able to defeat the Nupe Invaders during her reign. Ityavyar (2002) cited in Luka (2011) also testifies to the wily prowess of Wuli Emotan of Benin who lived in the second half of the 15th century. The recent past bears testimony of prominent women leaders like Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, Wuraola Esan, Iyalode Tinubu of Lagos and so on (Mba, 1982).

In the 1999 general elections there were only 3 female senators namely Chief (Mrs.) Florence Ita-Giwa, Mrs. Stella Omu and Hajiya Khairat Abdul Razaq. The analysis below captures the situation of women in electoral politics in Nigeria. In 1999, only 12 females were elected into the state assemblies and only 13 females in the House of Representatives as against 347 males. By 2003, there was a slight increase to 39 females in the State Houses of Assembly as against 951 males; while female members of the House of Representatives grew to 21 against 339 males, and four females became senators.

The 2007 general elections led to significant improvements. Six women were elected deputy governors. In the House of Representatives, the number of women in the 360 member body actually plummeted from 21 in 2003 to 15 in 2007. No woman emerged as governor. The president and vice-president positions still remains artificially immune for women, with the number of female presidential aspirants dropping from two in 2003 to just one in 2007. Five women, however, sought the vice presidency position, again in small and weak parties. Consequently, there was generally an increase in the number of male governorship candidates that had women as their deputies. At least, four parties in Lagos State chose women to contest as deputy governors (Eme, *et.al*, 2008). In 1999, only Lagos State had an elected female deputy governor in the person of Mrs Kofoworola Akerele-Bucknor. In 2003 the number of deputy female governors increased to two. In 2007, it increased to 6 (Eme, Onyishi and Nwaoma, 2014).

The 2011 general elections produced only a female deputy governor in the person of Mrs Adejoke Orelope Adefulire of Lagos State (*Punch*, 2011). Quite a number of women won their parties' primary ticket for the National Assembly and the various States' Houses of Assembly. Out of the 109 Senators who emerged winners at the 2011 polls, only 7 were women. In the 2015 general elections, 8 women won the senatorial seats, while 14 won their election into the House of Representatives. Four female deputy governors emerged with none winning elections to occupy the position of governor (Gabriel, 2015). The decrease in the percentage of female candidates that won at the polls is disturbing for many political observers who would have predicted a rise in women's participation.

Table 1: Statistical Distribution of Women in Elective Positions between 1999 and 2015

S/N	Position	No of Available seats	No of Women Elected & % of Total in 1999	No of Women Elected & % of Total in 2003	No of Women Elected & % of Total in 2007	No of Women Elected & % of Total in 2011	No of Women Elected & % of Total in 2015
1	Presidency	1	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
2	Senate	109	3 (2.8%)	4 (3.7%)	9 (8.3%)	7 (6.4%)	8 (7.3%)
3	House of Reps	360	13 (3.6%)	21 (6%)	25 (7%)	19(5.28%)	14 (3.9)
4	Governorship	36	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
5	Deputy Governorship	36	0%	2(5.55%)	6 (16.6%)	1(0.09%)	4 (11.1)
6	State Houses of Assembly	990	12 (1.2%)	39 (4%)	54 (5.5%)	68 (6.9%)	39 (3.9%)

Source: Adapted from Eme *et al.* (2014) Women and Politics in Nigeria: Strategizing For 2015 and the Independent National Electoral Commission Headquarters, Abuja

Theoretical Framework

The radical feminist perspective of feminist theory and the mobilization model of participation and high intensity participation have been used to align the study into existing body of knowledge. For radical feminists, patriarchy is the most important concept for explaining gender inequalities. Although literally, it means 'rule by the father', radical feminists have used it more broadly to refer to male dominance in society. From this point of view, patriarchy involves the exercise of power by men over women.

In her book *Sexual Politics* (1970), Millet argued that politics is not just an activity confined to political parties and parliaments, but one which exists in any power structured relationships whereby one group of persons is controlled by another. Such relationship of dominance and subordination can exist at work, when a male superior instructs his female secretary to make a cup of tea or in the family when a husband's meal is cooked by his wife. Political relationships between men and women exist in all aspects of everyday life.

According to her, patriarchy is the most prevalent ideology of our culture and the most fundamental concept of power. It is more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform and more enduring.

The choice of the mobilization model of participation theory in explaining women's electoral behaviour is based on the rationality of its basic assumptions. The mobilization model claims that people participate in response to the political opportunity in their environment and to impetus from other people. Simply put, some people participate in electoral politics because the opportunities for them to do so are greater than for other people and also because they are persuaded to get involved by other people. This opportunity

can be discernibly linked to the resources model since people with high socio-economic status are more likely to have access to political parties and campaign organizations than are low status individuals because such institutions are commonly found in communities in which high status individuals live. Opportunities for participation are not uniform across the population. For this reason, an interaction between resources and opportunities mobilizes some people to get involved (Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995).

The radical perspective of feminist theory is a lens for people to see through the marginalization of women created by the patriarchal culture of most societies. Although not natural, the culture found its way into human society, became fully formed through the instrumentality of men by employing different aspects of the existing material and non-material culture of the society.

The nexus between the mobilization model of electoral participation and women's electoral behaviour lies in the place of opportunity for women to participate in the political sphere. When women are seen as the weaker of the two sexes, when they are reduced in importance owing to some societal values, norms and beliefs which have neglected their meaningful contribution and have placed them in subordinate position to men in nation's political sphere (Agbalajobi, 2010), the political opportunity that suits gender equality cannot be said to be available and the relegation and insignificant position of women become more obvious.

Methodology

The study employed descriptive survey research design. Within this context, both quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted in gathering data. In other words, this approach made use of the questionnaire, in-depth and key informant interviews. The questionnaire was administered in all the sixteen wards of the Local Government Area on 275 literate adult females. Of all the copies of the questionnaire, 240 were retrieved. The samples were drawn using stratified random and judgement sampling techniques while simple descriptive analysis was employed. Also, 20 women (including teachers, civil servants, market women and religious leaders) were interviewed four of whom were key informants (politicians). While the qualitative instrument ensured introspective responses, the quantitative instrument ensured accuracy. It was for these reasons that both instruments were expedient so as to cater for the weaknesses of each other.

Study Area

Ado-Odo/Ota Local Government Area is located in the Western Senatorial District of Ogun State. It consists of Yewa and Awori Yoruba ethnic sub-groups (Okunola and Ojo, 2011). Bordered by Lagos State to the North-West, the Local Government is strategically located on the gateway to other West

African Countries aiding both formal and informal trans-border trade. There is the noticeable presence of other Nigerian ethnic nationalities especially the Igbo, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ibibio, Hausa-Fulani, Idoma, Tiv, Nupe and others residing in the Local government Area. Also, many nationals of neighbouring West African countries such as Benin Republic, Togo, Ghana, Niger and others have long settled there. Asians of Indian and Chinese extractions have also established their presence through the establishment of several industries in Ota, the headquarters of the local government.

The Local Government Area boasts of a range of cultural, traditional and historic attractions like the Egungun (Masquerade) and Odu'a festivals. The second oldest storey building in West Africa can be found in Ota at the Vicarage of the St. James Anglican Church built in 1842 (OSMLGCA, 2013).

Findings

Table I: Examining the trend of women's behaviour from the 2011 to 2015 elections in Ado-Odo/Ota Local government

Item	Item Description	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
1	Women expressed their behaviour only through voting in the 2011 general elections	53 22.1%	84 35.0%	39 16.2%	41 17.1%	23 9.6%	240 100%
2	More women contested for elective offices in the 2015 general elections in Ado-Odo/Ota	43 17.9%	58 24.2%	59 24.6%	55 22.9%	25 10.4%	240 100%
3	Many women were reluctant to vote in the 2011 and 2015 general elections	23 9.6%	63 26.3%	34 14.2%	66 27.5%	54 22.5%	240 100%
4	Women now take electoral politics more seriously	60 25.0%	96 40.0%	59 24.6%	12 5.0%	13 5.4%	240 100%

Field Survey, June/July, 2015

From the above table, 57.1% believed that women expressed their electoral behaviour only through voting in the 2011 general elections; while 16.2% were undecided on the item statement, 65.0% of the respondents believed that women now take electoral politics more serious. The 50.0% of the respondents strongly disagreed and believed that many women were reluctant to vote in the 2011 and 2015 general elections, only 14.2% were undecided on the item statement.

For item 5, an open-ended question, 52.1% were undecided as to what has changed about women's electoral behaviour since 2011. The 25.8% which represents a simple majority believed women's participation has increased and

2.1% agreed that more women now contest for elective posts. The 5.0% also agreed that women have built more courage in facing the challenges of electoral politics. The 7.9% identified an increase in women's political awareness. The 3.8% believed that the All Progressives Congress (APC) "change" catch phrase motivated women to be more actively involved. The 2.1% believed that women's participation has not really increased; this was supported by 1.3% who believed that nothing has really changed.

Table II: Suggesting measures for improving the level of women's participation as candidates in electoral politics

Item	Item Description	SA	A	U	D	SD	TOTAL
6	Limit should be set on cost of nomination forms and campaign funding	57 23.8%	98 40.8%	31 12.9%	30 10.0%	24 10.0%	240 100%
7	Political party and legislative quotas should be adopted to promote women's participation in electoral politics	79 32.9%	126 52.5%	24 10.0%	7 2.9%	4 1.7%	240 100%
8	Religious institutions should encourage women to participate more in electoral politics	76 31.7%	96 40.0%	45 17.7%	15 6.3%	8 3.3%	240 100%
9	Women should build intra and inter-party alliances	55 22.9%	121 50.4%	30 12.5%	13 5.4%	21 8.8%	240 100%

Field Survey, June/July 2015

The table above reveals that 64.6% supports the idea that limit should be set on the sale of forms and campaign funding. Luka (2011) had noted that nomination forms to contest for elective offices in most parties are very expensive; while 12.9% were undecided on the item statement, the adoption of political party and legislative quotas to promote women's electoral participation was highly favoured by 85.4% of the respondents.

Hoodfar and Tajani (2011) gave an analysis of the potency of political party and legislative quotas in their work on *Electoral Politics: Making Quotas Count for Women*. Erunke and Shuaibu (2013) have also agreed with the adoption of quotas between competing candidates. Moreover, 71.1% strongly agreed and agreed that religious institutions should encourage women to participate more in electoral politics. Olurode (2013) posits that it is necessary to re-shape attitude formation by concentrating on the primary agents of socialization which include the family, school and religious organization. 73.5% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that women should build

intra and inter-party alliances a recommendation Eme *et al.* (2014) gave in their work on *Women and Politics in Nigeria: Strategizing for 2015*.

For item 10, an open-ended question, 42.9% were undecided as to what suggestion to give in promoting women's participation as candidates in electoral politics. The 17.5% representing a simple majority identified the need to encourage women by giving them financial support and setting limit on the cost of nomination form and campaign funding. The 11.7% were of the opinion that better awareness should be created for women through more political education, 5.8% identified the need for women to be supported by their male counterparts, 5.0% supported the idea of adopting political party and legislative quotas for women and 2.9% of the respondents were of the opinion that political parties should field and support more women candidates. Other suggestions with insignificant percentages included social reorientation to reduce patriarchal identity, recognition for women, more empowerment programmes and the need for women themselves not to relent in their efforts to achieve higher gladiatorial participation.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

The examination of the trend of women's electoral behaviour between the 2011 and the 2015 Nigeria general elections revealed that women were very active in the electoral process in the last four years, but their level of participation has not been rewarded with enough elective positions. While women have participated actively in politics, such participation has been as voters, mobilizers, entertainers and support staff. They are however not rewarded with positions of power in political parties and are not given full opportunities to contest for elective offices.

Anike, a key informant believed that the 2011 elections were only fair enough. To her, women have always voted but judging along the continuum of participating as voters and contesting, they really need to do more. Her position was supported by eleven others one of whom said "Women turned up to vote but it is only a little of them that contested."

Wuraola, a market woman believed that women's contribution to electoral politics is much but only in terms of voting. In her words, "Obirin ko ipa to po gan sugbon nipa didi 'boni o'" [Translation: Women contributed in diverse ways but only as voters]. This position was supported by another market woman, Iyabo, who also blamed the men for not allowing the women to realise their full potentials in electoral politics. She said "ki nse pe obirin o ki ngbaruku ti ara won, sugbon awon okunrin ni ko ki nfun won laye" [Translation: It is not that women don't support each other, it is the men that do not give room for their participation].

On whether the trend has changed over the last four years, Interviewees seem to agree more on this question. Nineteen of the respondents believed that

women's participation has greatly increased. Although they all agree that women still need to intensify their efforts. A teacher, Mrs Taylor believed that their attitude is being changed recently. She identified the poor state of the economy during Jonathan's administration as a trigger to women's participation because women felt the hardship more as their husbands were unable to put good food on the table. This position was supported by a sales executive Arinola, who in her words said:

I feel women participated more because everyone was shouting change, change. Women came out to vote more; that was what I observed personally. I voted and many people that I know also voted.

Another respondent, Mrs Madu, believed that women's participation has improved as many of them now express the willingness to participate more in politics both at the spectatorial and gladiatorial level. In her words, "It has really changed. More women are willing to support women and more women are willing to take up governmental positions."

One of the four key informants' positions however differs. In her words:

At the national level, it is coming down because we are having less women and none of them is holding any key post. Thank God we have seen women contesting in gubernatorial elections. We need more awareness to let women know that what a man can do, a woman can do better because God has made us to be caring and listening.

Lastly, in the effort to identify measures of addressing women's low candidacy in electoral politics, Interviewees agreed on many of the suggestions recommended in the questionnaire. A civil servant who claimed anonymity also supported this position. In her words, "Women need to be enlightened not to see politics as what only men can do. They should contribute their own part too".

Mrs Orekoya, a teacher, recommended that government should set a limit on the cost of nomination forms, and that men should be convinced to allow their spouse contest for elective positions. In her words:

Government should reduce the price of form. The government should convince the men to allow their women to contest, because the woman may have the interest but what about the husband who may discourage her.

Another civil servant, Mrs Akininuola reasoned that women need more orientation about politics. She disagreed with others who proposed that women should be financially supported. In her words, "Women too are buoyant so financial problem is not a major problem."

One of the market women, Mrs Ajayi appealed to the government to assist the women and encourage them. In her words, “Awon Ijoba ki won ran Obirin lowo ki won de encourage won” [Translation: The government should assist the women and encourage them].

Two other market women who claimed anonymity also added their voice to the interview question. For the first, she said “Kia ma je kosuwa, ki ama je ko re wa. Lojo kan Lojo kan, ire ayo wa ade” she said. [Translation: We should not be deterred, we should not be weary, one day, our good will come.

The other was very optimistic. She advised women not to relent in their quest for electoral victory. She said women are now emerging as deputies; they are the mothers of lawyers and presidents. Women are merciful because they are mothers and that men should encourage them. To her, men are wicked and where a man is being harsh on someone, a woman will be mild in her approach. In her words:

Awon oloselu obirin, ki won ma tesiwaju. Ki won ma ju owo sile. Obirin ti ndi vice ni sin yi. Awa ni Iya Lawyer, Iya Governor, Iya President. Obirin ni anu, tori abiyamo ni won. Ki awon okunrin gba won laye. Odaju ni awon Okunrin, ibi ti okunrin ba ti njagbe mo yan, obirin a fa yan mo ra ni. Iwo na wo ni bi ti baba ba ti njagbe, gbogbo oun ti iya ba ni lo ma fi se iranlowo.

[Translation: The female politicians should keep matching on, they must not relent. Women are now being made vice [sic]. We are the mother of the lawyers, the mother of governors, the mother of presidents. Women are merciful, because they are mothers. Let the men give them a chance. Men are callous, where a man is yelling at someone, a woman will draw you closer. For instance, in a situation where the father is yelling, the mother will render assistance with all that she has].

Agbalajobi (2010), Ngara and Ayabam (2013), Olurode (2013), Oni (2014), Ugwugede (2014), Abubakar and Ahmad (2014) have suggested measures for improving women’s participation as candidates in electoral politics in their works on women’s political participation, many of which are in consonance with the results obtained in the course of this study.

Findings revealed that women have built more courage in facing the challenges of electoral politics and that their level of awareness has increased over the last four years in Ado-Odo/Ota Local Government. Several measures to improve women’s participation as candidates in electoral politics have also been suggested. The study suggested the adoption of party and legislative quotas, financial support for women, political education, male counterparts’

support, social reorientation to accepting women as equals to men, women empowerment programmes, addressing abuse of women, fielding and sponsoring women candidates by political parties and supporting them financially. Women have also been advised not to relent in their quest for electoral success.

Conclusion

Women's participation in electoral politics is only highly observable at the spectatorial and transitorial level. Climbing the electoral ladder and expressing themselves at the gladiatorial level remains a difficult task for many. A major reason for this is the role compartmentalization between men and women on grounds of the theory of biological determinism expressed through the instrumentality patriarchy. The relevance of this study to scholarship is underscored by the perspective it gives into understanding the nature of structural violence which is not physical but deeply rooted in the culture of patriarchy to marginalize women and diminish their access to elective positions, a phenomenon that is generalized enough to have warranted national and international corrective efforts.

It is very important for the Nigerian government in its quest for development to recognise and incorporate reasonable gender perspective into its operation. Marginalization of women in electoral politics actually weakens democracies as the voice of half of the population goes unheard. It is equally important that implemented policies and programmes in the sphere of electoral politics be adequately monitored and evaluated.

To rapidly address the low representation of women in electoral politics and improve their electoral behaviour, gender quota should be adopted. Among the types of gender quotas recommended by Hoodfar and Tajani (2011) in their work, *Electoral Politics: Making Quotas Work for Women*, the study finds the political party quotas and legislative quotas to be easily adaptable to Nigeria's political terrain.

(a) Political Party Quota: This type of quota system because it does not require any governmental or legal oversight tends to be the least controversial. In the Nigerian context, it has been observed that stronger political parties tend to perceive women as "risky" candidates and their chances of securing party nomination are always very slim. Government institutions, Non-Governmental Organizations, religious institutions should therefore encourage political parties to aim for at least 35% of women among their candidates to be presented to the electorate as this will further strengthen the provision of the National Gender Policy which was developed and adopted in 2006.

(b) Legislative Quota: This type of quota is different from party quota because it has the force of law that compels political institutions and individuals to oblige. A legislative quota is advised for adoption to accentuate the seriousness of government at introducing a National Gender Policy. To further fortify the system, sanctions should also be instituted against non-compliance.

The girl-child should also be targeted for improved political education. One of the ways to enhance improved political behaviour of women is to work with the children before they form strong habits or prejudices. In various institutions of basic learning, the girl-child should be entrusted with more leadership responsibilities. It is believed that this measure would go a long way in drawing the consciousness of the girl-child to taking up leadership responsibilities. This experience at the micro-society will prepare her (the girl-child) for what is politically obtainable in larger world.

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