



**British Journal of Education, Society &
Behavioural Science**
3(2): 154-162, 2013

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Sociological Explanations of Male Dominance in Nigerian Party Politics: Implications for Education

Felix M. E. Okpilike^{1*} and G.O. Abamba²

¹*Faculty of Education, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.*

²*College of Education, Agbor, Nigeria.*

Authors' contributions

Authors FMEO and GOA designed the study, performed the statistical analysis and wrote the draft of the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Research Article

Received 16th August 2012
Accepted 27th November 2012
Published 14th February 2013

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we examine the issue of male dominance in Nigeria's party politics where men occupy more than 90% of elective positions. In other words, women occupy less than 10%. Generally, all over the world, men dominate politics, although, in some countries, such as Rwanda and South Africa, women occupy over 40% of the positions due to the quota policy. In Nigeria where such policy is not implemented, certain factors limit the participation of women in politics. These are cultural, religious, high poverty level, high illiteracy level, corruption, Nigeria's brand of politics, women apathy and the apathy of husbands towards their wives' involvement in politics. To create an enabling environment for women to participate actively in politics, an education programme which would give Nigerian leaders a re-orientation was suggested. Qualitative public education system right from elementary school and basic education up to the College of Education level would significantly eliminate the obstacles against Nigerian women and enhance their participation in politics.

Keywords: *Male Dominance; Nigerian Politics; Gender; Corruption; Sociology.*

*Corresponding author: Email: femokpilike@yahoo.com;

1. INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, both in politics and government, rarely do women hold offices because they are considered too weak and emotional to exercise leadership. Thus, they are continuously excluded from decision-making situations. However, since colonial rule and beyond, there has been a gradual inclusion of women in decision making situations in society. Right from the oil boom period and its related social changes in the 1970s' some change began on the liberation of women. The rapid expansion in education, including higher education, brought about the emergence of a new generation of highly educated women and, gradually, more women have begun to enter party politics and stand for elective positions; though politics and public life remain overwhelmingly dominated by men. Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, the country has been under democratic rule at different times. The first was between 1960 and 1966; the second, between 1979 and 1983; a partial third republic from 1991-1993 and a fourth which began in 1999 and has continued till date. Throughout these periods, men dominated both in politics and elective posts.

However, by the 2011 elections, there were noticeable changes due to increased number of women that contested compared to the previous electoral years. For the first time in the history of democratic rule in Nigeria, a woman, contested the presidential primaries in her party, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) level. It made news. Just before the elections, there were five female governorship candidates, 88 women contesting senatorial seats, 218 women for seats in House of Representatives and 493 for the various state Houses of Assembly [1]. Despite this increased number of women contestants, men won majority of the positions. It is against this background that this study has its major objective of highlighting the dominance of males in Nigerian party politics, the sociological factors that account for this and the role of education in changing the attitudes of the people and the institutions.

1.1 Records of Elective offices Showing Male Dominance

Tables 1 – 4 show the record of some elective offices occupied by men and women in the elections between 1999 and 2011. From Table 1, only 16 positions were occupied by females while men occupied 525. Table 2 shows that women occupied only 25 out of a total of 614 positions after the 2003 elections, 41 positions out of 641 following the 2007 elections (Table 3) and 18 out of 523 positions after the 2011 elections (Table 4).

Table 1. Elective offices occupied by women after 1999 elections

Offices	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Governors	36	100	Nil	Nil	36
Senate	106	91.2	03	2.8	109
House of Reps	347	96.4	13	3.6	360
Speakers of State Assemblies	36	100	00	00	36
Grand Total	525	97	16	3	541

Source: (UNICEF, Nigeria 2011).

Table 2. Offices occupied by women after the 2003 elections

Offices	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Governors	36	100	00	00	36
Senate	105	100	04		109
Houses of Reps	339	94	21	6	360
Speakers of State Assemblies	36	100	00	00	36
Total	516		25		41

Source: (Inter-Gender, Jos).

Table 3. Elective offices occupied by women after the 2007 elections

Offices	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Governors	36	100	00		36
Senate	100	91.7	09	8.3	109
House of Reps	328	93.7	32	7	360
Speakers of State Assemblies	36	100	00	-	36
Total	500		41		641

Source: (INEC, 2007).

Table 4. Elective offices occupied by women after the 2011 elections

Offices	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Governors	36	100	00	00	36
Senate	101	92.7	08	7.3	109
Speakers of State Houses of Assembly	35	97.2	01	2.8	36
House of Rep	336	93.9	24	6.7	360
Total	508	93.9	33	6.1	541

Source: (INEC, 2011)

At the end of the 2011 elections, none of the five women governorship candidates won. Only one state had a woman as a deputy governor. Of the 88 that contested the senatorial seats, only 8 of them won [2]. Although, there is a remarkable increase in this number, the senate is still heavily dominated by men. After the inauguration of the elected political office holders, another round of politicking started particularly in the House of Representatives. At the national level, a female politician was hoping to be the speaker of the House of Representatives. Her south-west home region also hoped she would clinch the position particularly with the zoning formula of her political party (PDP). But a male member of the same political party was also interested in the position even though according to their political party's policy, his zone was not entitled to that position. However, from a sociological point of view, it became a contest between a male and a female. After the voting the male scored 252 while the female scored 90 thereby losing the position. Of the 36 Houses of Assembly in the country, only 1, Oyo State, has a woman as a speaker. Incidentally, she is the only female out of the 32 member assembly [3]. Delta and Edo State Houses of Assembly had one female each. On the whole, despite the fact that more women participated in the 2011 general elections, they did not succeed in increasing their number in elective offices.

1.2 Global Situations

The situation in other parts of the world is actually not different. There is no society or country where women outnumber men both in party politics and in elective offices. However, in Sierra Leone, there is a female Head of State. The Chancellor of Germany is a female. Thailand recently elected a woman as the country's Prime Minister. In America, and Britain, more women are actively involved in party politics. Political empowerment for women was one of the Millennium Development Goals to which 188 countries, including Nigeria, subscribed in the year 2000. However, despite all these steps and despite the fact that more women are into active party politics, women representation remains low. The Millennium Development Goals Report [5] noted that "representation by women in parliament is at an all-time high, but falls shamefully short of parity" (p22). This conclusion was arrived at after detailed analysis of female representation in different regions of the world (Table 5).

Table 5. Female representation (%) in different parts of the world

Regions	Year	
	2000	2011
Oceania	4	2
West Asia	4	9
North Africa	3	12
Caucasus & Central Asia	2	16
South-Eastern Asia	12	18
Southern Asia	7	10
Eastern Asia	19.9	19.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	13	20
Latin America & Caribbean	15	23
Developed Regimes	16	23
Developing Regimes	12	18
Summary, Worldwide	14	19

Source: (Millennium Development Goals Report, 2011).

Some countries achieved very high level of women participation and success. For example Rwanda had 56.3 percent, Sweden, 45 percent and South Africa, 44.5 percent. Nigeria is amongst the 48 countries having less than 10 percent. Some other nine countries amongst them Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Palau have no woman at all. According to the [5], those countries that recorded huge success did so because of the quota arrangement both at the party and national levels. A key factor identified against the general low participation of women is "shortage of media coverage and public appearances".

These general world levels of participation of men and women, as well as the factors that heavily weigh against women generally seem to reflect what obtains in party politics in Nigeria.

1.3 Factors Militating Against Effective Women Participation in Politics in Nigeria

Very many factors are responsible for the low level of women participation and success in politics and government. Some of these factors are discussed below.

1.4 Cultural Factor

The Nigerian society, like many other societies of the world, is a patriarchal society but its resilience is still very high in Nigeria. Right from the formation of the different political parties, men take the lead. Hence there is no political party which has a woman as its chairperson, secretary or even holding any sensitive office in the party. This is a reflection of the cultures of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Due to this attitude, men are expected to be pace-setters for the women to follow; not the other way round. An opinion poll of 100 men in South-South Geo-political zone, randomly selected, indicates that none of them would accept to belong to a party founded by women with over 50% of the key positions held by women. The response from all the hundred men was an emphatic "NO". This response shows that even if women have all the means to float a political party, such party will not have male followership. Given this cultural attitude, Nigerian women cannot compete on equal basis with the men in politics. Since women are not part and cannot be part of the party formation process, of course, it cannot be expected that those (the men) that formed the political parties will fold their hands and hand-over the running of the party to women.

Another opinion poll of 50 men and 50 women conducted by the researchers as to whether they would vote for a woman candidate as Nigeria's president shows that none of them was inclined to do so. The respondents were required to answer 'Yes' or 'No' as to whether they would vote for a male or a female presidential candidate in an election. The response from both males and females not only confirms the resilience of patriarchal attitude but also brings to the fore that even women are not yet ready to give support to their gender type. One would have expected that as women always speak against gender inequality in political representation, they would seize every opportunity to support one of their kind.

1.5 Religious Factor

Weighing very heavily against the women folk are the tenets of the Islamic religion as been practiced in Nigeria. Among the Muslim communities, particularly those in Northern Nigeria, very many of their girl-children are married off at a very tender age [2]. By the time they grow into adulthood in marriage – assuming they are allowed to participate actively in politics by their husbands – they are ill-equipped to participate. Some women from this region who were politically active, had to contend with demeaning treatments such as public flogging, expulsion from their state of birth and imprisonment. All of these were meted on them just for being politically active [2]. In the light of this, women who are actively pursuing political ambition will be seen as irresponsible. Therefore, such women can never receive support from politicians who are Moslems. This is also true in other parts of the world where Islam is a way of life. Examples of such places are United Arab Emirate (UAE), Oman, and Qatar, to mention but a few [5]. In Pakistan, where a woman was elected as that country's Prime minister, she was assassinated in office.

1.6 High Poverty Level

Although there is high level of poverty in Nigeria generally, the women folk are worse hit. Politics is not a cheap enterprise. It requires huge financial investment and since the women politicians do not have such money to invest, there is no way they can assert themselves in the political arena. As a result of the weak financial strength of the women politicians in Nigeria, the wife of the Head of State had to raise money through the Women's Ministry. The money was specifically to support the women in partisan politics for their campaigns. To

reach the electorate, politicians rely on extensive publicity and campaign. All these involve huge expenditure.

In fact, many of the women in the Senate and House of Representatives may have benefitted from the financial strength of either their fathers or spouses in order to meet the cost of election campaigns. For as long as the women folk are economically incapacitated, there is no way they can assert themselves over the men in politics.

This statement agrees with what the [5] noted that lack of media coverage and public appearance worked against women. This is also true of the women in Nigeria due to their low level of financial capability.

1.7 High Illiteracy Level

In a survey of women aged 30-45 years conducted by UNICEF, Nigeria in 2004, only 60 percent manage to complete their elementary education and only 26 percent proceeded to the secondary level. Also in a survey conducted by the National Population Commission [6], 50 percent of women had no formal schooling. If formal schooling has a relationship with the level of awareness, one can conclude that a high percentage of women are politically ignorant. In local political meetings at the ward level, nearly all the women were passive listeners while the men did the talking. In fact, many women party supporters do so hoping that they will be able to share in the material things their parties may bring. The high level of illiteracy is a hindrance to the women-folk being able to articulate issues. With such high level of ignorance, it will be difficult for the men, and even the general public, to leave political matters in the hands of women. All of these contrast with what obtains in developed countries such as Britain, USA and France. In the US for example, due to the high awareness level of the women folk, they are taken into consideration in party policies. As noted in [7], "Labour, Party since 1997 has been making deliberate attempts to attract women votes and the parties had campaigned on issues that are known to be higher priorities for women voters than for men" (p 586). Nigeria as a nation is yet to attain that high level of awareness through literacy education.

1.8 Corruption

The print media in Nigeria have drawn attention to the high level of corruption in the country. There was the Haliburton Saga involving trillions of US Dollars, the power sector scandal and many others. The most recent is that involving the former Speaker of the National House of Representatives, his deputy and all members of the then House of Representatives [8] [9], carried the caption "Looting Spree: How Ex-Governors Squandered Public Funds". It is interesting to note that all involved in these degrading acts are men. Based on this observation, the question was posed to 100 respondents, randomly sampled, across Delta State, as to which gender creates enabling environment for corruption. All the respondents were of the opinion that the men are "good" at creating opportunities for corruption. This translates to the fact that men will not allow a woman to occupy any position where barriers will be created to their ambition to engage in corrupt practices. But then, some argued that speaker from May 2007 –November 2007, was impeached due to corruption. However, her recent exoneration [10] by the same male dominated House of Representatives that once convicted and impeached her gives room for sociological thoughts. In fact, it appears that her impeachment from the seat was to pave way for the

male politicians to carry out their thievery, unhindered, otherwise how can one explain the speed with which the female speaker was removed?.

1.9 Nigeria's Brand of Politics

Politics in Nigeria seems synonymous with violence. There had been cases of political assassinations and thugery in Nigerian political party politics which scare women from participation.

Closely related to this is the type of power associated with political seats. "Power "as defined by [11] is the chance of a MAN or a number of MEN to realize their own will in a communal action, even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action". In effect, women generally do not possess such power or such force. Since there is a significant relationship between politics and power or vice versa, no matter the level of a woman's administrative competence, when it comes to Political power, they are by and large not capable of wielding such power over the men who of course outnumber them.

1.10 Political Apathy among Women

The generality of women in Nigeria are actually not interested in politics. Of the 50 female lecturers and senior non-academic female staff in the Delta State University, Abraka, who were asked if they would prefer politics to their academic and administrative work, all of them actually preferred their lecturing and administrative jobs to politics. When asked if they would give politics a second thought if their respective communities approached them to be their representatives, all of them said they would not think of it. This in effect means that many women who have had high level of education and therefore capable of involving themselves in politics are not interested in it at all. The sample drawn from the Delta state University, Abraka is assumed to be representative since the university community is made up of men and women from different parts of the country.

Further, marriage acts as a barrier to women's effective participation in politics. Many men do not want their wives to be involved in politics. Fifty male lecturers and administrative staff, also of Delta State University, Abraka, were asked if they would sponsor their wives in politics. All of them answered in the negative. This is contrary to what obtains in the western world. For example, in the United States of America, Bill Clinton is well known for encouraging and sponsoring his wife in politics. In Britain, the traditional institution is not gender conscious. The monarchical seat can be occupied by either of the genders - the only criteria being that whoever becomes the king or queen is a biological descendant. The position of the present Queen of England attests to this.

Having examined these sociological factors weighing against the effective participation of women in politics, we now proceed to examine the role of education in removing those barriers.

1.11 The Role of Education

Education is considered as an important agent of social change. Considering the high level of vices in the social life of Nigeria, it is necessary to design an education which would give a different orientation to the society. The curriculum of education should emphasize the importance of seeing the development of society as being dependent on the contribution of

both men and women. The curriculum should also emphasize selfless service as well as honesty in the discharge of duty which should start at the primary school level and run through the university stage. By the time such education takes root it would change people's mindset, and give birth to a society of equal opportunities for the genders.

The country's educational system needs to be overhauled so as to provide quality education for all children irrespective of gender and social status of parents. All schools, beginning with the elementary schools should be well equipped with up-to-date facilities. Ghana, which is a neighboring West African country, is already taking such steps. For example, in 1987, Ghana established the Science Technology, Mathematics Education (STME) clinic for girls. The clinics were decentralized to the district levels. These clinics were specifically designed to stimulate girls in pursuing school education particularly in science and technology at all levels of education. Through the clinics the girls are also brought in contact with renowned women scientists and technologists.

Since poverty is a scourge which deprives many girls from pursuing school education, the Basic Education curriculum should be designed in such a way that right from elementary four, pupils should be introduced to vocational and technical subjects which will also continue at the junior secondary level. This would enable the youths be adaptable to societal needs and be self-reliant on graduation. Such education would make for gender equity in all aspects – including politics.

2. CONCLUSION

This study showed that there is indeed male dominance in Nigerian's party politics. This is confirmed by the number of males that occupy elective offices. Many sociological factors accounted for this. The study then recommended the political education be introduced since it is believed that, education is a major instrument in changing people's attitude to life with political participation as no exemption.

The Nigerian society with its cultural and religious practices can never be a favourable ground for women to effectively participate in politics. The socio-cultural environment is overwhelmingly patriarchal it is also plagued by violence and corruption. These constitute a hindrance to women empowerment and effective participation in politics. Those in positions of authority and administration need an education of re-orientation.

Quality education should be provided in the country with all elementary schools having ICT centres since Nigeria has the means to give all citizens in the country qualitative education. Basic Education should be expanded and extended to the College of Education level to include Vocational, Technical and functional literacy courses. By the time this is implemented faithfully, perhaps in the next, 20, 30, or 40 years, those factors weighing against women politically in Nigeria shall have reduced. May be then, they will not only have a level playing ground to vie but actually succeed.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Peer-review history:

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