

---

*WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN NIGERIA, PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS*

---

**EZEODILI-OTTI VERA NKIRUKA**

**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

**FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC OKO,**

**ANAMBRA STATE**

**NIGERIA.**

**Abstract**

According to religious belief, both man and woman are created by God therefore, are equal before God. But in African culture, especially in Nigeria, gender inequality affects active participation of women in politics because the men assume superiority over the women. The government general perception of women in politics is quite negative and it effects their contributions to the development of the nation. Gender relationship is to a great extent unequal. The universal declaration of human right states that individuals are born free and have equal rights, but it is a common knowledge that in their daily experiences, women do not enjoy the same rights and privileges, autonomy and power as men. They do not have the same control over their lives and production. Their participation in political structure in which decisions affecting their lives are taken is minimal.

Therefore this paper focuses mainly on the problems affecting women's participation in politics in Nigeria and strategies to remedy the problems.

**Keywords:** Women, Politics, Participation , Gender, Government.

**Introduction**

The sharp under-representation and lack of participation in decision-making bodies,

highlights the marginalization of women throughout the world. Quite to the contrary, the predominance of men as parliamentarians, cabinet ministers and heads of government is outstanding.

Although seen to be very active in their communities, women are inadequately represented in their local political structures, except where conscious efforts have been made to guarantee a quota for women.

In Nigeria, women participation in politics is reduced to nothing as a result of discrimination against them. Maduabuchi (1998) revealed that their male counterparts have not always rewarded the extent of women participation in politics. Although women willingly exercise the rights that they have, structural constraints from the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras continue to prevent the elimination of discrimination against them. It is true that there are number of women who have had distinguished political careers, but in terms of representation, this bears little relation to their numbers and potentials. This means that decisions are male oriented. Although an increasing number of women aspire for political positions, politics is often regarded as an exclusive domain of men.

Anne Wilson Schaef (1981) in her book titled, "Women's participation in Politics includes the fact that women are naturally being silent. She further asserts that the controller-controlee question takes over every aspect of a woman's life. From a very early age, women are apparently cut

off from all internal and external sources of intelligence, fail to develop their own minds and see themselves as remarkably powerless and dependent on others for their survival. Unquestioned submission to the immediate commands of authorities is what makes the woman virtuous in many cultures. Men emerge from childhood as active beings and getting things done while women are passive, incompetent and lacking in confidence. They are regarded as incapable of handling social discourse and problems, hence, they should not hold positions of governance.

### **Statement of problem**

Politics is popularly known as a game of numbers, yet the contemporary Nigerian political system is male dominated and has systematically excluded women from equal participation.

Discrimination affects women's political and civil rights. The enfranchisement of women in the North was one of the political demands made by women's organizations in both the East and West after their own enfranchisement but the rights to vote was only granted to women in Northern Nigeria in 1979, in the East, it had been granted in 1954, and in the West in 1958 (Mbachu 1998:25). Some

have argued that the exercise of this right may be problematic even where it is guaranteed because of social constraints on the movement of women in purdah. For instance, Akande (1979) suggests that women who are secluded in Purdah may be unable to vote as a result of the electoral rules which end the voting day at 6.00 p.m. because women in purdah cannot go out until after sundown (Akande) J.O, laws and customs affecting women's status in Nigeria (1979).

The male dominant elements of Nigerian society remain strong. Many of these elements are located within the family, where a woman is required to take care of her husband and children. Since most women also work outside the home, this creates a double burden and may limit the ability of women to concentrate on their political careers. In Nigeria law and administrative practice, the predominant attitude is that men are the household heads and have primary authority. This attitude persists in spite of past and contemporary examples of cross-gender co-operation in many households and also despite the existence of many female headed family units (Mba) the position of women in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965), Okeke (1999) observed women thus continue to be defined just in terms of their reproductive

and associated roles. He revealed that under the statutory law in Nigeria, the woman must cook and care for the home and health of her husband and children.

The United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (UNCEDAW) calls for temporary special measures aimed at accelerating equality between men and women in order to achieve equality of opportunity and treatment. Towards this end, Nigeria appointed the first woman member of the Federal Civil Service commission. Other nominal appointments of woman were made mandatory, yet, there is still evidence that lack access to high levels of decision making in government. With this, it seems that the educational and professional achievements among Nigerian women were not recognized. (Article IV of the UNCEDAW 1979).

In Nigeria, it is true that there are number of women who have had distinguished political careers, but in terms of representation, this bears little relation to their numbers and potentials. This means that political decisions are male oriented. Although an increasing number of women aspire for political positions, politics is often regarded as an exclusive domain of men.

Illiteracy is a special handicap to women, and discourages them from participating in politics, governance and occupying positions of authority. It is a well known fact that, in many Nigerian cultures up till this date, many parents denied and have continued to deny their female children access to education. They have this erroneous impression that training female children means “training another man’s village” (Obi M, international Journal of Studies in Humanities, Vol. IV, 2007, page 227). In view of this, female children were denied access to education early in life. Hence, some men see the women as those who are not intelligent and therefore should be confined only in a cubicle the kitchen. Women who lack access to education cannot be gainfully employed in any meaningful job not to talk of positions of governance and leadership. They will always be brain washed subordinated and victimized by the opposite sexes. Although in the recent times, this issue of access to education is taking a dramatic turn because many women are now seriously embracing education, they still suffer discrimination in the hands of men especially in political participation. Men feel that women’s occupying political positions does not take care of their homes as a mother, and that some of them even disrespect their

husbands, therefore other woman aspiring for political positions should be discouraged.

Nigerian women are usually overburdened with household chores that they have little or no time to watch and listen to television talk shows, or even attend political rallies and campaigns because of de-politicization of female children in Nigeria which commenced early in life and turned many of them into social and political misfit.

Some of the Nigerian native laws and customs that disinherit female children is another problem that affects women’s interest in politics. In most Nigerian cultures, family inheritances are transferred only to male children. This leaves the female children financially incapacitated to participate in politics or lobby for governance and leadership positions. Lack of access to family inheritance or financial incapacitation makes it difficult for women to establish private firms or to obtain micro-credits since they have no collateral to enable them do so.

It is on this note that the study therefore seeks to achieve the following objectives;

- (1) To determine whether women participation in politics effects their roles at home as mothers.
- (2) To examine the extent women have participated in politics in Nigeria.

## Methodology

This work comprises both primary and secondary data. The primary data consist mainly of the questionnaire. The researcher personally distributed the questionnaire to the public or respondents to know their views as regards women participation in politics in Nigeria.

There are some secondary sources used as data collection, which includes, library research, in other words textbooks, periodicals, Journals, Newspapers, Internet sources etc.

## Hypotheses

- (1) Women participation in politics will not significantly affect their roles at home as mothers.
- (2) The extent of women participation in politics in Nigeria will not be significantly low.

**DECISION RULE:** If the calculated (Obtained) value is greater than the tabulated (critical) value, we accept the alternative hypotheses and reject the null hypotheses. But if the calculated value is

less than the tabulated value, we reject the alternative hypotheses and accept the null hypotheses.

$$\therefore X^2 = \sum(O - E)^2$$

Where; O = observed frequency

E = Expected Frequency

$\Sigma$  = Summation

$X^2$  = Chi square

Level of significance = 0.05 or  $P < 0.05$

Degree of Freedom for  $X^2 = n - 1$

Where n = number of category

1 = constant

X (Category)	O	E	O-E	(O-E) <sup>2</sup>	(O-E) <sup>2</sup> / E
Strongly Agree	65	30	35	1225	40.8
Agree	50	30	20	400	13.3
Strongly disagree	15	30	-15	225	7.5



Disagree	10	30	- 20	400	13.3
Undecided	10	30	- 20	400	13.3
Total	150				88.2

$$E = \frac{\text{Total number respondents}}{\text{Number of category}}$$

$$\therefore E = \frac{150}{5} = 30$$

$$x^2 \text{ Cal} = 88.2$$

$$\text{Level of significance} = \frac{5}{100} = 0.05$$

$$df = n-1$$

$$= 5-1$$

$$df = 4$$

$$x^2 \text{ tab} = 3.84$$

### Decision

Since the calculated value is greater than the tabulated value, we therefore reject the null hypotheses and accept the alternative hypothesis thus,  $x^2 = 88.2, 4, P < 0.05$ .

This therefore, shows that women participation in politics has significantly affected their roles at home as mothers.

### Test of Hypotheses 2

Alternative Hypotheses

$H_a$ ; the extent of women participation in politics in Nigeria will be significantly low.

**Decision rule:** if the calculated (Obtained) Value is greater than the tabulated (critical) value, we accept the alternative hypotheses and reject the null hypotheses. But if the reverse is the case, we accept the null hypotheses and reject the alternative, hypotheses.

$$\therefore x^2 = \sum \left( \frac{O-E}{E} \right)^2$$

Where O - Observed Frequency  
E - Expected Frequency  
 $x^2$  - Chi Square

Level of significance = .05 or  $P < 0.05$

Degree of freedom for  $x^2 = n-1$

Where n = number of category

1 = constant

X (Category)	O	E	O-E	(O-E) <sup>2</sup>	(O-E) <sup>2</sup> /E
	70	30	40	1600	53.3

Strongly Agree					
Agree	30	30	0	0	0
Strongly disagree	10	30	- 20	400	13.3
Disagree	20	30	- 10	100	3.3
Undecided	20	30	- 10	100	3.3
Total	150				73.2

null hypotheses and accept the alternative hypotheses, thus  $X^2 = 72.3, 4, P < 0.05$ .

This reveals that the extent of women participation in politics in Nigeria is significantly low.

### Result /findings

This study has disclosed some important points associated with the issue of women participation in politics. The research questionnaire is made up of fourteen (14) questions which responses has been collected, and analyzed but could not be presented one after the other due to limited number of pages required of this paper.

The first hypotheses states that women participation in politics will not significantly affect their roles at home as mothers.

While the second hypotheses states that the extent of women participation in politics in Nigeria will not be significantly low.

However, the first hypotheses was rejected thus;  $x^2 = 88.2, 4, P < 0.05$ .

This show that majority of the respondents both male and female were of the view that women participation in politics affects their role at home as mothers. It was observed that if women were given opportunity to

$$E = \frac{\text{Total number respondents}}{\text{Number of category}}$$

$$\therefore E = \frac{150}{5} = 30$$

$$x^2 \text{ Cal} = 73.25$$

$$\text{Level of significance} = \frac{73.25}{10} = 0.05$$

$$df = n-1$$

$$= 5-1$$

$$df = 4$$

$$X^2 \text{ tab} = 3.84$$

### Decision

Since the calculated value is greater than the tabulated value, we therefore reject the

participate in politics, they would not have time to take care of their home and children.

Furthermore, the second hypotheses was also rejected thus;  $\chi^2 = 73.2, 4, P < 0.05$ .

This reveals that the respondent both males and females maintained that the extent of women participation in politic in Nigeria is very low, and this was observed to be as a result of some factors which include;

- a. Discrimination against women, which made politics an exclusive domain of men.
- b. Educational inequality in which women were given fewer education opportunities than men.
- c. Threat of family disruption, which put women in position where they have no access to family inheritance.
- d. The nature of women which made them to obey instructions given by their husbands, and in most cases, it affects their extent in political participation.

### **Implication of results/findings**

Women participation in politics in Nigeria are being faced with numerous problems which affects their effective participation.

Some of these problems include:

#### **Stereotyping:**

Sex stereotyping is as a result of tradition and culture that created inequality between

men and women, as well as male domination of the society. This stereotyping is transmitted to the people at childhood from homes, schools, way of life, and the larger society. Each generation transmits them to the next generation and there by perpetuate the superiority of the male over the female. Indeed, whatever the child learns from home about stereotyping influences her attitudes and behaviour as she grows up to maturity. He/She grows up to believe that the female is tender, weak, soft spoken, and submissive, while the male is strong, aggressive, courageous, efficient and stubborn among other traits. The female bares and rears children, they are regarded as housekeepers, and so should stay at home and do domestic chores. Whereas the male is the breadwinner, Lord and master of everybody in the house, decision maker etc. His world is the law within his household and should be obeyed by everyone. Stereotype is a problem to women participation in politics, that is, as a result of stereotype, women sees themselves through the eyes of men and this resulted to lack of career planning and education as well as underutilization of their talents and potentials.

**Sex Discrimination:** This has effectively affected women participation in politics in Nigeria. The men always discriminate



against women especially in the aspects of leadership. Despite the fact that some women are more intelligent, capable, and competent than men, yet the meaningful and useful talents are being wasted as a result of sex discrimination.

**Non-Introduction of Partisan Politics:** in Nigeria, male politicians and leaders have refused to involve women in most aspect of political affairs. Men always hold the most tangible and sensitive political and government posts without involving women not minding or considering their qualification, talents, and ability.

**Religious Belief:** This is one of the major problems facing women participation in politics in Nigeria. Certain people oppose women's participation in politics on the basis of erroneous interpretation of religious injunction. These view are promoted above all by educated men of the petty bourgeoisie who see women as their rivals in the labour market. Both Christians and Moslem religions do not help women in their struggle as effective members of the society.

**Illiteracy/Poverty:** Majority of women are uneducated and this breeds ignorance and poverty. Illiteracy is found to be higher among women mostly in rural areas. Illiteracy therefor constitutes a very

grievous problem women encounter in political participation.

**Lack of Finance:** This is a setback to women participation in politics in Nigeria. Very few women who are interested to participate in politics do not have the money to campaign for election Unlike their male counterparts, and men at the same time refuse to sponsor them.

**Legislation:** The ancient tradition and European Law stress the subordination of women to men authority. Hence a revising of some sections of the laws that are oppressive to women could bring about reform and alleviate the suffering of women in political participation. The principle of equality of the sexes are enshrined in our laws and constitution. However the problem is not implementation of the law. Women are not protected against legal circumvention. This is very glaring in politics and educational laws with regards to segregation of interest, career choice etc.

**Lack of self confidence:** The majority of women have failed to have confidence on themselves. They are of the opinion that they cannot carry out any social activity without the support of the men. This affects their effective participation in politics.

**Conclusion**

Women need political participation because they have been lowly placed in the society not on empirical evidence or facts, rather on patriotically ideologies. The women must therefore participate in defining their problems, identifying the solutions, applying the solutions, and accessing the outcome of their effort.

Finally, men's attitude towards women in Nigeria with regard to accepting them into political or leadership position is quite negative and therefore should be eliminated.

### **Recommendations**

Some of the recommendations that should be put in place to overcome the problem of women participation in politics in Nigeria area;

- a. Enact laws which abolish harmful traditional practices, land ownership etc.
- b. Encourage women folk alongside their male counterparts to take advantages of education opportunities.
- c. Involve women in decision making from family to village and to the national levels.
- d. Provision of training for women in leadership, politics and organization, and improved basic rural infrastructures.

- e. Avoidance of sex discrimination against women, introduction of partisan politics in Nigeria where men and women are to be used equally for the betterment of the society.

### **References**

- Brooks, A.E (1998) "political participation of women in Africa". A cad. Of Political science.
- Brown R (1995) Social psychology, the free press, New York.
- Coles, Catherine and Mack Beverly "Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century. Madison. University of Wincon sin
- Elindero O.J (1997) " correlates of Physics achievement: the Role of Gender and Non-Induced student Expectation" Journal of Experimental Education, 54, pp.189-192
- Obi M (2007) international Journal of studies in Humanities, Vol. IV page 227.

