

Review

Patriarchy and governance: Interrogating gender issues in political participation in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: Ideal democratic governance is not often determined by the composition of its institutions, but rather by their openness to uniformity, fairness, and equal political participation of the diverse groups that make up the society. Thus, the success or failure of an ideal democracy is entirely dependent on the 'policy of inclusion,' or the equal distribution of political power between men and women within a state. The principle of chauvinism, on the other hand, has been used in a variety of ways to deny women the right to govern. To summarize, the Nigerian political system and governance process are largely dictated, dominated, and classified on a masculine basis. This study examines the interplay between patriarchy, governance and political participation in Nigeria with a focus on the unequal power relations between men and women in governance in Nigeria. The paper utilizes qualitative research method and relies mainly on data collected from secondary sources. The research is based on the social liberal feminist theory of gender politics. Findings of the study revealed that participation in governance in Nigeria is not gendered as it usually exhibits the tendencies for *male democracy*. Among others, the paper recommends opened and competitive political space that will give equal participation opportunities to both men and women in the society.

Keywords: Patriarchy, democracy, governance, political participation, gender

INTRODUCTION

In recent literature, growing debates about democracy have revealed that a democratic system of government is not an end in itself, but rather a means to achieving good governance. The essence of true democratic governance is not usually defined on the constituents of its institutions, but by the liberality of these institutions to equality in political participation devoid of gender restrictions. Women's roles in global politics have sparked heated debates over the years. The role of women in the political process, according to liberals, cannot be overstated (Erunke, 2009). Culturally, the Nigerian state is built with the male gender elevated in every sphere of its life, while women's roles, according to conservative theorists, generally end in the kitchen Arowolo and Aluko (2010) were cited in (Erunke, 2013). This belief system, on the other hand, is not unique to Nigeria. Because of Africa's patriarchal nature and structure, it is widely believed and accepted that men are born to rule. This is attributed to patriarchal societal structures, cultural stereotypes, religious beliefs, and

traditional practices. Essentially, men and women's relationships have been governed by tradition, culture, and religion for centuries, and male dominance has been ingrained in the structure of social organization and institutions at all levels of leadership. It has lasted through ages. As a result, men have largely dictated and dominated the political space and governance process, resulting in inequality in political participation and governance (Erunke, 2013).

According to Afolabi (2003) cited in (Agbalajobi, 2010), women, who account for roughly half of the world's population, play five major key roles in society: mother, producer, home-manager, community organizer, and socio-cultural and political activists. Women's participation in politics is therefore central to the development of any country Latif et al. (2015) cited in (Shumaila et al., 2016). This is due, in large part, to their reproductive roles in almost all aspects. A typical woman's nature is reproductive. She possesses an innate ability to wield political power over others. Unfortunately,

the power wielded by women is hardly visible as they are often relegated into background in issues that matter. In spite of the obvious roles of women in the family and society at large, they have, however, constantly been deprived of holding any elective position and virtually been discriminated from governance. This anomaly is extended to the level of labour division in the Nigeria political system where divisions are made on gender basis. In essence, sexes are assigned to different complementary tasks within the system (Agbalajobi, 2009). Patriarchy justifies marginalization of women in education, economy, labour market, politics, business, family, domestic matters and inheritance Salaam, 2003 cited in (Makama, 2013). Most societies have relegated the capacity of women, and considered them as weaker vessels, thereby affecting their participation of in most developmental programmes, politics and administration. Needless to say, an ideal democratic society with a female population of 50% should consider incorporating them into politics and governance. To achieve the best results in a true democratic government, men and women should have equal voices and rights in decision-making and policy implementation (Oni and Joshua, 2012). It is against this backdrop that it becomes imperative to interrogate the patriarchy nature and structure of Nigeria state with unequal power interplay between the male and female in governance.

Patriarchy, gender, governance and democracy: a conceptual discourse

The interplay of patriarchy, gender, governance, and democracy is complicated. To facilitate our understanding of the subject matter, it is necessary to make a conceptual clarification of the terms.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is described as the power of the father as the head of a household (Makama, 2013). It is viewed as the male supremacy and female subordination (Kamarae, 1992; Stacey, 1993; Aina, 1998 cited in (Makama, 2013). It is a term that has been frequently used to define a system of male authority over women through its social, political and economic institutions. This form of relationship between male and female is a relationship where the male gender oppressed his female counterpart hence; it is characterized by discrimination of the female (Makama, 2013). The feminist viewed patriarchy as an unjust social system that is oppressive to women. Explaining it from a political perspective, Carole Pateman a feminist and political theorist writes in her work that "The patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection." Carole 1988 cited in

(Makama, 2013). In feminist theory the concept of patriarchy often includes all the social mechanisms that reproduce and exert male dominance over women. Feminist theory typically characterizes patriarchy as a social construction, which can be overcome by revealing and critically analyzing its manifestations (Ann, 2001).

However, in the work of Nadine, 2019 the patriarchal system is said to date back to capitalism, where men dominated women and children within the family. To him, Patriarchy is commonly referred to as a structure or a system that governs social relations pertaining to binary genders within societies. The main attribute of patriarchal social structures is the domination, oppression and exploitation of women by men (Nadine, 2019). In the same vein, Okpe (2005) submits that patriarchy is a broad network or system of hierarchical organization that cuts across political, economic, social, religion, cultural, industrial and financial spheres, under which the overwhelming number of upper positions in society are either occupied or controlled and dominated by men. Thus, any system that operationalizes an order that accords men undue advantage over women is considered patriarchal. To him, patriarchy is considered the head of the household and within the family he controls productive resources, labour force, and reproductive capacities based on the notions of superiority and inferiority and legitimized by differences in gender and generation (Okpe, 2005).

Gender

Gender is the socially and culturally designed roles for men and women (Makama, 2013). It is the role of men as owners of property, decision makers and heads of household which are socially, historically and culturally constructed and have nothing to do with biological differences (Makama, 2013). Gender has been viewed as the socially constructed attributes, opportunities and relationships associated with being male and female and which determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context Waylen, 1994; Henderson, 2006 cited in (Oni and Joshua, 2012). Similarly, Oostergaard 1992 cited in (Oni and Joshua, 2012) defined gender as the qualitative and interdependent character of women's and men's position in society. According to him, gender relations are constituted in terms of the relations of power and dominance that structure the life chances of women and men. Such relations are not necessarily biological but a matter of social convention.

Governance

Governance implies the efficient management of state institutions (Ayatse et al., 2013). It is the process of state

and society's navigation towards accomplishment of collective goals. In governance, the issues of public accountability, transparency in government procedures of rule of law, and public sector management are of high importance Adejumbi 2004 cited in (Ayatse et al.2013). Describing governance, Rhodes (1997) posits, it is a process of policy formulation in which state actors share power with private actors. Also, governance implies a symbiotic relationship between participatory development and good governance. According to Rockman and Weaver 2000 cited in (Para-Mallam, 2017), good governance provides the social and political environment conducive to participatory democracy and development. They however identify eight essential ingredients of good governance. According to them, it is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. These characteristics underscore the responsibility of States to ensure that all citizens, regardless of sex or any other identity marker, possess sufficient capacity and leverage to participate actively and effectively in all decision-making processes.

Democracy

Democracy is not a new phenomenon. However, it has emerged as the most significant trend in the world politics over the past years. Democracy describes, fairness, equality in the participation of men and women in determining the control of power in a society Pateman, 1970; Agbaje, 1999:193 and Anifowose, 2004:205 cited in (Oni and Joshua, 2012). It is predicated upon freedom, justice and equal treatment of all citizens— men and women alike, by the society Nwabueze, 1993:2 cited in (Oni and Joshua, 2012). As noted by Ayoade (1998:11), *“Democracy is the form of government in which every citizen in a state has political investments of political participation and trust. This system of government is owned by the people whom it governs. It is this ownership that makes it tenable and acceptable to the people.... it is marked by the continuous dialogue and interaction between those who govern and are ruled”*. Democracy from the definition of Ayoade, implies that power practically belong to the entire citizens. Similarly, democracy according to Ake (2000) is a concept that is uncharacteristically precise. It simply connotes popular power. It is not about delegated authority, or representative governance, but about popular expression of power by the people. Popular power as Ake opines is the essence of democracy. It is an expression of power by the people. In a nutshell, in democracy, the power entirely belongs to the people.

However, the basic characteristics of democracy include the existence of the mechanism for political and economic choice, balanced political structure and stable political system where periodic elections are held in

which the people renew the mandate of those they love and accept or terminate those they are dissatisfied with through the succession of a new government (Ayatse et al.2013). Consequently, since equal political participation is *sin qua non* to democracy, a society cannot be truly democratized without the full and active participation of women who constitute about 50% of the population of the country.

Theoretical perspective

In the world over, history has shown that women have been subjected to domination by men. However, the control of women by men in the socio-political and economic is not only limited to Nigeria, but a common place across the continents of the world (Agbalajobi, 2010). As earlier established, the subjection of women in politics and governance can be arrogated to cultural stereotype, abuse of religion, traditional practices, patriarchal societal structures where economic, political and social power are determined by men. Historically, the role played by women has been that of followers of male political leaders (Agbalajobi 2010, Erunke and Shuaibu, 2013). As considered in the work of Agbalajobi, this form of discrimination is a global phenomenon. From his perspective, the only different between African and all other continents is the fact that it lasted for a long time in this part of the world. As other developed nations are moving toward gender equality, this part of the world still denies women from participating in governance.

Universally, democracy is the most acceptable system of government that allows equal participation of all citizens in governance, without the consideration of gender, ethnic or religion affiliations. Democratic governance has been observed to be an adequate and most enabling style of governance that enables citizen active participation in their affairs. Obi (2007) rightly put it that democracy accommodates different ethnic units, cultures, sexes and religions and at the same time guarantees individuals right. Despite Nigeria's claims to be a democratic state, women have been unjustifiable discriminated in various ways. An instance of women who propose to stand for sureties for accused persons who have secured bail routinely disqualified simply because they are women Agbalajobi (2010). Sadly, women have unconsciously relegated themselves by not believing in their ability and capability. According to Anifowose (2004), in places like Britain and the U.S., where there is established democracy, male polyarchies is still prevalent. Even famous advocates of democratic and republican government rejected claims that women are full citizens. The reason for the claim is as a result of the fact that women are mostly seen as the second class citizens. It is believed that the proper role of women is basically restricted in the marriage procreation and family, not governance Anifowose (2004). Thus, John

Locke held that “all men are by nature equal, they never recommended that women be allowed to vote and considered it more or less self-evident that in family matters, the husbands have the final say” (Anifowose, 2004). Historically, Anifowose (2004) posits that men’s physical appearance has greatly contributed to male superior nature. He notes that “men are generally heavier, taller and even physically stronger than women and therefore more capable than women to enforce their will through physical violence and threat of violence’. Conversely, women are vulnerable because of the role they play in child bearing and nursing, adding that the discrimination and subjugation of women is also as a result of enforcement of custom, traditional practices, beliefs and the law.

In sum, discrimination against women in governance has its root in the nature of African societies which Nigeria is not exempted. This nature exalts and celebrates men as being unique, stronger and fit for the public space while women are feeble and weak and meant to stay within the confluence of their homes. This has gone a long way to affect women’s thinking and perception of governance and has therefore lead to a very low level of political interest, knowledge and activity of women in the country’s governance.

Political participation and gender equality in Nigeria

Globally, participation of women in politics and governance as whole has been on the lower range. Basically, this is especially frequent in Africa and third world countries (Adedayo and Ayodeji, 2013). This, as earlier established, is consequent upon the patriarchal nature of most African societies where women are left to play the second-fiddle through certain cultural sentiments (Adedayo and Ayodeji, 2013).

Maclosky 1968 cited in (Awofeso and Odeyemi, 2014) defines political participation as voluntary activities shared by members of a society in the selection of their rulers and their direct or indirect involvement in the formation of public policies. By the definition, political participation connotes action(s) by individuals in the selection of their rulers and general involvement in formulation of public policies. On the same note, in the work of Omodia et al. (2013), political participation involves varying ways of the exercise of power by the people and their influence over political processes the kind which has the potential of attracting best brains without gender consideration. Moving a little further, Okolie (2006) perceives it to include freedom of expression, association, right to free flow of communication, influence decision process, and right to social justice. According to him; it also expresses such rights to demand for better social and health services, better working conditions, and increase in wages, amongst others. Participation in politics can also be a

means by which decisions are influenced to deliberately interfere in the course of an action for a common interest by individuals or groups. Corroborating this, Lawson and Wasburn (1969) cited in Omodia et al. (2013) states that political participation defines both individuals and group agitations and interests, with each of these individuals or groups acting solely or through group organization and attempting to influence decision-making or altering the manner in which power may be distributed and the principles by which it may be exercised in a particular society. However, this has to do with the full involvement of people, politically refer to as ‘electorates’. Thus, Igwe (2002) cited in Osimen et al. (2018), is the degree and forms of involvement of the people governance and related institutions of society.

Actively, political participation involves participation in political campaigns and debates, attending caucus or strategy meetings of political parties, voting during elections, standing as candidates for elections, and holding of government and party posts.

The essence of political participation in a given society, whether or not civilized or primitive, is to mainly seek, acquire and dispense power to organized society, in order to harness and distribute resources to influence decision making in line with organized or individual interests (Arowolo and Abe, 2008). All groups (including those of women) seek to influence the dispensation of power in line with their articulated interests as a fundamental motive of political participation. However, during the pre-colonial period in Nigeria, despite being a patriarchal society where by men were assumed born to rule, some regions, has a rich history that is marked with the contributions of women to politics (Luka, 2011). During this period, women were actively involved in the precolonial politics and governance and assume other leadership roles. Adefemi and Agunbiade (2019) explain that in pre-colonial Nigeria , women folks exhibit some leadership qualities, that enables them to be occupies leadership positions and as well play leadership roles in their various capacity. In traditional societies, political power was diffused, not concentrated in one single individual or level of authority. As Onwuzirike, (2003) observed, women occupied important roles in the traditional political life and in their different regions; they were actively engaged in politics and held decision-making roles in the governmental institution in their respective regions. Therefore, the extent of women’s participation in the public sphere in the precolonial Nigeria was grossly dependent on the organization of such society, whether in the form of monarchy like the Yoruba kingdom or as republican like the Igbo tribes (Nwankwo, 1996). For instance, in Yoruba land, women held political offices like Iyalode, Iyaloja, Iyalaje. The change of government from the Hausa aristocracy to the Fulani/Muslim hegemony however, totally excluded women from the public sphere. After the reign of Amina in the pre-Islamic past of Zaria, there was no woman who

sat in the court of any Hausa ruler (Aiyede, 2006). Thus, it is clearly seen that despite the patriarchy nature of the Nigerian society, prior to colonialism, women have been actively involved in traditional politics based on their regions. With the coming of colonialism, there was a decline in the participation of women in Nigeria politics (Adefemi and Agunbiade, 2019).

Women's poor participation in politics, like many other problems in Nigeria, has a deep root in the system carved and imposed by colonialism (Omotola, 2007). It began with the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorate, in which all the three regions (Yoruba in the Southwest, the Igbo in the southeast, and the Hausa/Fulani in the North) that were separately and independently governing one another were brought together under one umbrella by the colonial government. Hence, the positions of women were totally relegated by the colonial government (Omotola, 2007). Women were seen as second to none in their plan. This was done to the length that the first constitution in Nigeria, that was authored by Sir Hugh Clifford-named Clifford Constitution in 1922, disenfranchised women and limited the participation of adult to the wealthy (Ajayi,2004).In the Southwestern Nigeria, a section of women voted for the first time in the nation's electoral history in the 1959 general elections; their Northern counterparts could not vote until 1976- fifty-four years after the elective principle was introduced to Nigeria Ako-Nai (2003) cited in (Adefemi and Agunbiade,2019). Thus, The Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), and Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) gathered varying levels of support from women's groups for success. Before, 1958 elections, women were unable to feature as the prominent leaders in the parties or given ticket to vie for an elective position, but rather, as supporters or voting in an election Ahonsi-Yakubu (2001) cited in (Adefemi and Agunbiade, 2019). It was only Wurola Esan who got appointed to the Senate of 36 members, while no woman was elected to the 312-member House of Representatives and federal cabinet. Igbo women were members of the NCNC, and women such as Margaret Ekpo, Mrs. Mary Nzimiro, were elected members of the National Executive Council (NEC) in 1957. They participated actively during parties' primaries and campaigns (Nwankwo, 1996).

With the emergence of post-colonial government, political leadership in 1960, Nigerian women have remained invisible in governance and politics. Women who are members of any political parties are just mere party or campaign organizers (Olojede, 1999). The first republic (1960-1966) saw only an insignificant member of women in Southeast playing prominent roles. In the Eastern House of Assembly for instance, only two women were members: Mrs. Margaret Ekpo and Mrs. Janet Muokelu. From 1960 -1965, there were only four women who actively occupy elective positions. They are two female legislators in the federal parliament and four

female legislators in the whole of the country (Adefemi and Agunbiade, 2019). The military takeover, in the political sphere in 1966, did not foster women's participation in governance and politics as whole. Therefore, participation of women in politics prior to re-democratization in Nigeria in 1999 has been insignificant compared with their male counterpart.

Consequently, women participation in Nigeria politics over the years has been extremely low compare with their male counterparts due to some certain factors as highlighted by Oguadimma et al. (2020) are lack of the girl-child education, lack of financial power, psychological, disempowerment, the nature of politics in Nigeria and a lack of a basic educational foundation and women not having confidence in their ability to rule and lead the nation. All these factors have been impeding the participation of women in governance in Nigeria.

Gendering democratic governance in Nigeria

Democratic governance is said to be predicated upon freedom, justice and equal treatment of all citizens— men and women alike, by the society Nwabueze, 1993 cited in (Oni and Josuha, 2012). It provides an equal opportunity and platform for political participation and decision making process (Sodaro, 2001). Since equal political participation is *sin qua non* to democracy (Anifowose, 2004), a society cannot be truly democratized without the full and active participation of women in politics and governance. Not as nominal but active participants, who also vie for political position. Recently, studies have shown that attaining gender equality has been the focus of the international and local organizations. Various governments in the past in Nigeria have tried as much as possible to put measures in place in order to enhance gender equality. Over the last twenty-five years, since the 1995 conference on women in Beijing, the principle of gender mainstreaming has dominated much of the discussion on better gendering governance (Walby, 2005) with systematic consideration of gender issues (Rees, 1998). Various successive governments have tried putting women, in their gradual consciousness of state of mind and also in recent times; increasingly seek power equation and distribution and redistribution of resources in their favour. Efforts by government would, however require that "a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making" Council of Europe, 1998 cited in (Oni and Josuha,2012).

Identifying violence and other forms of electoral conflicts perpetrated and perpetuated by men and male youths as the major barriers inhibiting women's active participation in Nigerian politics, Adeniyi (2003) highlighted patriarchy, stigmatizations, low level of education, financing, religious and cultural barriers and lastly political godfatherism are major barriers to active

participation of women in Nigerian politics. Not only that, the public perception of female politicians is also a factor that militates against the performance of women in politics. The aforementioned have, over the years, denied women the opportunity of performing their own quota to the development of the society they belong. It is interesting to note that society recognizes the value of women as voters in a democratic process, yet they are perceived as incapable of governing, hence their limited acceptance to ascend the pinnacle of decision-making and participate in power structures.

Drastic steps should be taken to dismantle the patriarchal structures that create power imbalance between women and men to avoid continuous gendering democratic governance in Nigeria. The education of girl child should be as important as that of boy child most especially to the government of the day. According to chief Obafemi Awolowo cited in (Okeya, 2017), a person lagging in education will remain lagging and backward in other areas of human endeavor. This however throw light on the reason why the education of a girl child is every important. An aggressive education of female children, women is definitely an antidote to an abysmal and embarrassing level of gender disparity in Nigerian politics and governance (Okeya, 2017). It is important to note at this junction that there is no substitute to education. The system can only make use of the educated mind at the expense of illiterate. However, girl education will reduce illiteracy and increase political enlightenment. It would also increase the level of their skill acquisition and definitely increase productivity and as such will reduce poverty state among women and however increase their economy strength which is needed in the contemporary politics. Therefore, laws should be made against withdrawal of girl child from school. Likewise, there should a movement by the civil society organization or the government on the enlightenment of the public as against the perception of women as inferior to men. It is a general societal belief most especially in Nigeria setting that few women in politics lack virtue and moral rectitude. However, these make many women with high profile of education and integrity to be far away from politics. Because, they do not want the long standing image built to be damage by politics. Not only that, the society in this apart of the world sees female politician as prostitutes and women of easy virtue with broken home, whose major business in politics is to prostitute around in order to have a favorably and juicy prostitution. All these fallacies discourage women from actively involving in politics and governance. It is however, important for the civil society organization to take a stand and enlightening the general public as against the perception they have concerning female politicians.

Furthermore, women should build confidence and believe in themselves that they can make positive change in governance and decision making process in the nation. Women actually do not believe themselves or support

each other's dream. They are usually of the opinion that their female counterpart cannot do it better. However, women should stop working against themselves; they should unanimously come together as united force to work against the obstacle standing between them and their political emancipation. Therefore, they should support, promote, and encourage one another in achieving their political dreams. That however will make women more relevant in politics and governance. Lastly to enhance gendered governance, there should be opened and competitive political space that will give equal participation opportunities to both men and women.

Conclusion

This paper has been able to establish the fact that gender imbalance is well pronounced in Nigeria as a result of the patriarchy structure and nature of Nigerian political system. However, over the years, there has been an increasing global campaign which has raised popular consciousness and intense academic discourse on the poor participation of women in politics across the globe. Since sustainable democratic government relies upon the participation of all citizens in determining through elections and political processes, who governs them, the need for women's involvement in political and human development cannot be over emphasized.

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