

WOMEN AGAINST WOMEN? WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

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Abstract: This paper examines women's participation in politics and their performance in electoral contests. Nigeria embraced democracy in 1999 after 16 years of consecutive military rule. Among the features of democracy, there is universal suffrage which ensures participation of all eligible citizens in the process of electing a leader. This paper adopts a qualitative method using data collected from In-Depth Interviews and Key Informant Interviews in some selected states in Nigeria. The findings of the study reveal that there is an increase in the number of women who participated in political party rallies, campaigns and registered as a voter but the percentage of women who won elected political offices and political appointments are not commensurate with their level of participation. The study establishes that despite the number of registered female voters in the general elections, they lack identity consciousness to vote for female candidates to reduce the gap between male and female representation in government. The preference of male candidates over female candidates could be attributed to religious, cultural, economic and psychological factors. The paper concludes that the absence of identity consciousness among women has aggravated the marginalized condition of women in government. Therefore, the reasons for the low participation of women in democratic governance in Nigeria – apart from cultural, financial and religious factors – are emotional factors and a lack of identity consciousness.

Keywords: democracy, Nigeria, participation, shared consciousness, women.

INTRODUCTION

In a 21st century globalized world, many developing countries are not under the leadership of elected leaders while, virtually all political leaders in developed or established democracies were democratically elected. As in developed democracies, in emerging democracies, periodic elections are also conducted regardless of their nature, manner, and standard of the conduct and preparedness of the electoral body. This shows that leaders have reluctantly permitted multiparty democracy for mass participation in democratic processes and popular representation in government. In one of the democratic processes election in both developed and developing democracies, women constitute a significant proportion of the electorate and voter turnout. However, the numerical strength of registered female voters and the high rate of turnout on election day without the commensurate victory of female candidates at the polls demands a cogent theoretical explanation which goes beyond the customary institutional and sociocultural factors interpreted as gender inequality, exclusion, and stereotype.

Gender, like any other concept in the tradition of constructionist social theorists, is socially constructed. It is a mixture of cultural and religious beliefs in social relations and assigning roles to humans. These roles define social norms for social interactions right from the onset of the socialization process among people of different biological makeups. However, when exclusion, stereotype, and discrimination are perpetuated by people who share the same group identity, it is no longer the marginalization of one gender by the other as the society deems it fit to. Female voter turnout has been higher than men's in every presidential election since 1980 in the United States of America (CAWP 2019). Women are more active in elections than men in 21 countries in the world, yet female candidates were unable to edge out male candidates at the polls. Notably among the 21 countries are Belarus, New Zealand, Russia, Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, the political activity in which women participate in more is voting. Empirical evidence reveals that women turn out more than



men during an election in most elections in the world. For example, during the 1998 election in the United States of America (USA), 35 per cent of women voted during the election but none of the Presidential candidates was a woman. Regarding the age of those who voted, elderly people voted more than the younger generation constituting 59 per cent of women above the age of 75 whereas women in the younger age bracket accounted for 68 per cent. Among those who cast ballot at the 2018 Presidential election, there were 65.3 million women and 56.9 million men (CAWP 2019). In short:

Besides, overall, women outnumber men in the American electorate, so that the number of female voters has exceeded the number of men in every presidential election since 1964, a difference of some 7.2 million votes in 1996. Similar trends are evident in Britain, where the gender gap in turnout reversed in 1979 so that by the 1997 election an estimated 17.7 million women voted compared with around 15.8 million men. Long-term secular trends in social norms and structural lifestyles seem to have contributed towards removing many factors that inhibited women's voting participation (Gratschew, Pintor 2002: 96).

Similarly, in two countries (Barbados and Sweden), statistics revealed that more women than men have consistently turned out to cast their ballot in elections. In the countries under comparison, however, in the 1950s and 1960s women participated less often than men which produced a modest gender gap in Germany, Finland and Iceland and a substantial gap in India. At the end of the time series analysis, in the 1990s, the gender gap closed or even reversed in all societies except India, where women continued to turnout at markedly lower rates than men, although even there the trend was towards a slight closure of the gap (Gratschew, Pintor 2002: 96). More than one and half decades after the cross-sectional studies, however, there were a lot of changes that took place as a result of different initiatives for women's emancipation and inclusion in leadership even though they were still underrepresented in government. A study after the 2014 elections in India discovered that the gap had gradually increased. In 2014 women accounted for 8.1 per cent of the overall candidate

pool and 11.2 per cent of winners women remained massively underrepresented in parliament relative to their share of the general population (Vaishnav 2015: 41).

An institutionalized democracy is typified by an equal participation of all, without discrimination based on gender and/or other social categorizations. Despite the fact that women comprise nearly half of the world's population, they continue to be drastically underrepresented in political leadership positions around the world. They have little or no access to the very decision-making tables where the policies are made that govern their lives. While progress is being achieved, the gains have been slow. Women's access to public office remains unbalanced with respect to male counterparts, and biases and stigmas against women's political participation remain. According to the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, 96 per cent of the 144 countries covered in its report has closed the gap in terms of health outcomes between women and men, 95 per cent in educational attainment and 59 per cent in economic participation, but only 23 per cent of the political gap has been closed (World Economic Forum 2016). While this gender imbalance is concerning on its own as a human rights issue, it may also lead to a decrease, or stagnation, of a country's development (International Republican Institute, IRI 2015).

The Center for Information and Research on Civic Engagement conducted a survey which examined the voting behavior, gender, and age of the voters in the USA. The survey shows the decline of women's participation in civic duty from 1972 to 1994. However, from the year 2000 onward, there has been an increase of young women turn out to vote in an election. Specifically, college-educated young women, have voted and volunteered more and have been more civically engaged than their young male counterparts (Lopez, Kirby 2003). The reason for the engagement of more women in civic duty is that the government is viewed as the route to solving some of the problems faced by them in society. Similarly, in some developing democracies too, women broke the glass ceiling and won elective positions. These include Rwanda where women broke the record previously held by the same country for the world's

highest percentage of women parliamentarians in a single or lower chamber, by returning 45 women (56.25 per cent) to the 80-member Chamber of Deputies. In Palau, two women were elected to the enlarged 13-member Senate, becoming the first-ever women senators. However, no women were elected to the 16-member House of Delegates. Women also failed to gain representation in Belize, Nauru, Kuwait, and Tonga. Nine women assumed the post of Speaker following the 2008 elections in the following countries: Austria (National Council), Ghana, Pakistan (National Assembly), Romania (Chamber of Deputies), Rwanda (Chamber of Deputies), Serbia, United States of America (House of Representatives), Turkmenistan and Zimbabwe (Senate) (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2010: 6).

The problem of the study

The dominant notion about factors that deter women from holding political leadership in most African countries is attributed to economic and cultural factors, as well as religious beliefs. They reinforce social segregation, exclusion, and discrimination in public affairs especially leadership. The social environment, including cultural attitudes, gender norms and the prevalence of violence (physical and sexual), has an impact on women's participation in public affairs, especially political leadership in an African context. Social, cultural, and religious beliefs often shape gender norms regarding roles and activities that society considers appropriate for men and women. Attitudes towards a specific gender or social category, particularly women affect public perceptions of them as candidates in a political contest, elected officials, leaders, and decision-makers (DeSoi, Hubbard 2016). These attitudes can be exacerbated by media representation of women candidates, as well as its coverage of issues of particular importance to women, such as health and education (Nadezhda 2014). Threats and the commission of violence against women, both physical and sexual, deters women from exercising their right to vote as well as participating in politics and public life. Also, volatile security situations that make it unsafe for women to move

freely can deter women from voting and from running as candidates in parts of Africa (The Electoral Knowledge Network 2013).

Another problem associated with the above statement is that, in developing democracies like Nigeria, electoral bodies have no data of registered voters and votes cast based on gender. The availability of such data will enable people to know the voting strength of women and the level of their participation in democratic processes. It has been observed that the electoral body in Nigeria started keeping data based on gender during the 2019 General Elections: data based on registered voters, voter turnout to cast ballot and candidates who contested elective positions at different levels of government. Prior to the 2019 general elections, however, the data kept by the electoral commission in Nigeria was only for registered voters based on their gender. There was no statistical breakdown based on the gender of the electorate who cast their ballots at the elections conducted from 1999-2019. It has been observed that one of the major problems of electoral bodies in underdeveloped countries is the absence of data which would be useful in determining the extent of gender differences in political participation and the voting patterns of each gender (Ballington, Bardall, Palmieri, Sullivan 2015: 49). Such gender-aggregated data is important in tracking women's development in politics because, in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, there is poor visibility of women's participation in politics. This is based on the dominant notion in Nigeria that women's overall marginalization, even under globalization, is rooted in patriarchy. Patriarchy is indeed a fundamental cause of discriminatory practices that are directed at women whether in the economic or political sphere. These discriminatory processes often seek justification in women's assumed biological inferiority to men (Olurode 2013: 13).

Most of the literature on women's participation in political affairs and the democratic process has been focused on external impediments that prevent their visibility in political processes and winning electoral contests. These impediments are socio-cultural practices that regard women as cultural and socially incapable of leading and being entrusted with political

leadership. The IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems) conducted a global survey of Women's Organizations in 29 countries across the world where both males and females were sampled for the study. The outcome of the survey attributed cultural beliefs/social attitudes/patriarchal mentality as the main obstacle to the advancement of the political status of women (Huber, Kammerud 2017: 9). The work of Huber and Kammerud has identified some factors: beliefs, attitudes, and patriarchal mentality as barriers to women's political advancement. The work has not explained why in countries where there were female candidates and a substantial number of registered female voters who cast their ballot on election day, the vote was not in favor of female candidates. This is because the poor performance of female candidates in elections are beyond male dominance, cultural and religious beliefs which are the factors predominantly attributed to most studies on women's participation in politics, particularly in developing countries.

The objectives of this paper are, therefore: to examine the level of women participation in democratic processes, to examine the level of women's victory in electoral contests; to examine the rate of registered voters by gender and the rate at which women cast a ballot on election day. Specifically, it seeks to provide an in-depth explanation of why the majority of the female electorate does not cast their ballot for female candidates as a measure to close the gap between men and women in political leadership. To achieve these objectives, the study explores qualitative methods of data collection to elicit in-depth information from female politicians and voters. The attempt here is to provide a fresh explanation of why the majority of registered female voters do not cast their ballot for female candidates in an electoral contest.

Review of related literature: Women participation in democratic processes

In this section, the paper reviews findings from different parts of the world on how women defy cultural, economic and

social barriers in order to partake in democratic processes. These processes include joining political parties, participating in political rallies and campaigns, voter registration, contesting for electoral positions and ultimately, casting ballots on election day. Women have faced a lot of challenges in their attempts to challenge the status quo ante of male dominance in the sphere of political leadership in Nigeria. Male relatives or political party officials often advised women against standing for election for the following reason: they cannot withstand the pressure of local politics, as it usually entails violent attitudes and aggressions. Women have often been intimidated, threatened and even in some cases attacked by men who feel challenged by their presence and engagement. Within their political parties, some women were asked to provide sexual favors if they wished to progress within a political party and run for a local government office (International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics 2018: 5).

However, the level of female participation in the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria has shown a dramatic improvement, in contrast to the findings of the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics. Statistics from the Independent National Election Commission (INEC) show that a total of 84,004,084 eligible citizens registered for the 2019 general elections. Out of this number, 39.6 million registered voters were female which constitutes 47 per cent (INEC, 2019: 3). Similarly, there were 78 candidates across all electoral positions and political parties contesting for the office of Vice President out of which 22 (31 per cent) were female candidates and 51 (69 per cent) male (INEC 2019: 12). Furthermore, there were 69 candidates who vied for the Office of President, six of whom were women (8 per cent) while 67 were male (92 per cent). Despite the substantial number of female registered voters and candidates who overcame all barriers to secure the nomination of their political parties, they were not to secure support from registered female voters at the polls.

Similarly, in other parts of the world, recent developments have shown increased participation of women in election activities. The Center for American Women and Politics (2019: 1)



stated that the number of women who participated in elections outnumbered men in all presidential elections held from 1964 to the election that brought Donald Trump to power. The statistics showed that voter turnout rates for women had equaled or exceeded voter turnout rates for men. Women, who constitute more than half the population, cast their ballot, four and seven million more votes than men in 2000, 2004, 2004, 2008 elections. Additionally, the study found that in all presidential elections before 1980, the voter turnout rate for women was lower than the rate for men. The number of female voters had exceeded the number of male voters in every presidential election since 1964 (Center for American Women and Politics 2019: 1). Despite the significant and steady increase in women's participation in democratic processes, their participation has not translated into a victory for a female candidate(s) in any presidential election in the USA. Therefore, the issue of the under-representation of women in politics cannot be solely attributed to male dominance, economic power and cultural stereotypes in developing democracies. The above discourse shows that women are no longer bystanders during electioneering campaign activities but they are deeply involved at every stage of the process.

A comparative analysis of female participation in politics at the two general elections in Nigeria 2007 and 2011 showed that there was an impressive rise in the number of women who contested for different offices. In 2007, there were 516 women who vied for state houses of assembly: the national assembly, governorship, and the presidency. But in 2011, 921 women contested for elections into those offices, an increase of 78 per cent. Over the same period, male contestants increased by just 4.3 per cent (Olurode 2013: 20). The work of Olurode has shown that women are given opportunities in the political arena in developing countries, particularly in Nigeria. A substantial number of women politicians have challenged the cultural, financial and religious encumbrances in order to secure nomination tickets of their political parties. The issue at stake, however, is that after securing the ticket to contest, women who have a reasonable number of registered voters and turnout on election day, hardly vote for the female candidates.



Quadri (2019: 1) decried the performance of women at the 2015 General Elections. He stated that a decline in the performance of women was very troubling given the groundswell and campaign for popular participation by women in politics and governance.

The above studies conducted after the return of democracy to Nigeria in 1999, focused on the influence of social, religious and cultural factors as inhibitions to female representation in government, despite having a considerable number of registered voters and voter turnout on election day. The central argument, however, is not a lack of female participation in the electoral processes but their inability to win a contest in an election in which women turned out more than their male counterparts to cast their ballot. Before the recent political development which encouraged women's participation in politics in Nigeria (2007-2019), problems that had hindered the high rate of women's representation in government were socio-economic and cultural factors. The globalization of democracy and campaigns for gender equality across the world have increased the visibility of women at different stages of the democratic process, in Nigeria. Ibeanu (2009: 2-3) observed that the first indication was the growing "voice" and rising profile of women in the economy, community work and various spheres of professional and public engagements. The second was the gradual but steady withering of cultural restrictions on the perception of women in public affairs over the last three decades. The third was the rapid expansion in the work of activist organizations led by women and the supporting of the increased participation of women in politics and a resultant rise in the number of women joining politics and standing for elections. The fourth indication was the increasing tendency of women to take up economic roles previously reserved for men within the family and to question the myth of the "male-as-breadwinner" in many middle and low-income families. Ibeanu has summed up the political development of women, the withering of gender exclusion and marginalization as the world becomes a self-contained village and democratic norms are learned in Nigeria. However, like in the other literature reviewed, Ibeanu has not traced the root of the poor per-

formance of female candidates at the General Elections despite their efforts to overcome structural encumbrances. Therefore, it is one of the thrusts of this paper to tease out factors that account for the inability of female candidates to win elections despite possessing the requisite knowledge, experience, and financial power which, in the past, were the major barriers rendering women to be incapable of contesting even at the party's primary elections.

Connected with the above, is the representation of women in elective and appointed political positions. Emerging from the 2015 general elections, women secured only about 6 per cent of legislative seats in the National Assembly, no governorship seats and a few deputy governor positions. Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC) (2018: 1) cited the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which reported that Nigeria ranked 181 out of 193 countries when it came to women in national parliaments. These are abysmal statistics considering the fact that women constitute half of the Nigerian population, as well as its voting population. Weak female participation has been attributed to structural barriers that limit women's options to run for office such as the capacity deficit, low interest, lack of access to education and resources, an unequal playing field, lack of internal party democracy and the high cost of campaigning. Additionally, the reason for the low representation of women in the elective positions is the inability of women to coalesce behind qualified female candidates during elections (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, PLAC 2018: 4). The PLAC observed that such an abysmal proportion of women in roles of political leadership has happened at a time when about half of Nigerians are women and have a constitutional right to vote and hold public offices in all tiers of government. However, women continue to be under-represented at the national, state and local government levels. In the national parliament in 2015, 94.3 per cent of seats were occupied by men compared to the 5.7 per cent occupied by women. At the state and local government levels, women seem not to have appeared in the power equation. Besides, men dominate the judiciary at the state level. Among the high-ranking government



administrators with decision-making powers, women were equally underrepresented (PLAC 2018: 6).

High rate of voter turnout but inability to win elections

The broad aim of this paper is to provide a logical analysis of why women, who possess a sizable percentage of registered voters in most elections in the world, are unable to vote for and elect female candidates. In some countries in Africa, husbands among the married women and male family members for the unmarried are a strong influence. The majority of female voters in Africa vote for the preferred candidates of their husbands, for fear of divorce. Collaboratively, a study conducted in Egypt by Carter Center revealed that, in several areas of the country, women were threatened with divorce if they did not vote as their husbands instructed. The power of patriarchal influence prevents female voters to vote for female candidates especially when the female candidate is not the choice of the husband (Carter Center 2012). However, the findings of the Carter Center have not provided more insight beyond the already known cultural and social belief systems which are anti-women leadership in some African societies. In some of the areas surveyed, it has painted a picture of a master-slave relationship between husband and wife where the wife has no opinion or choice when casting her vote.

Similarly, the gap between female and male registered voters in Nigeria is merely 6 per cent. Even so, the country has the lowest rate of women in parliament in Africa, with the number progressively decreasing since 2011. In the 2019 elections, the number of women in the National Assembly fell below five percent. There are no temporary special measures to promote women's participation and, due to a lack of provisions for independent candidacy, women can only run through political parties. There has been a continued lack of promotion of women by political parties. Women have also been underrepresented in media coverage of elections (EU Final Report 2019). The Report also followed the trend of superficial attribution of women underrepresentation in politics and gov-



ernment attributed to structural and institutional factors. The defeat of women at the polls has not been explained even when they had adequate media coverage, a secured ticket of a political platform and the money to finance their campaign.

Apart from the structural obstacles observed by other studies, it is expected that women who venture into politics against all odds, participate in the political processes and secure the nomination of a political party in order to contest and win an election. Women have been the overwhelming majority of those who cast their ballot at the polls. The refusal of female voters to vote for female candidates has been attributed to internal hatred among women. A study conducted in Nigeria by Nwabunkeonye concluded that the average female voter in Nigeria hardly votes for female candidates in an election. Female aspirants and candidates often lack the support of their fellow women politically, which is a major challenge to their active participation in politics. Women in Nigeria do not have expected confidence in the leadership abilities of their fellow women and do not support them in winning elections (Nwabunkeonye 2014: 288). The work of Nwabunkeonye, unlike other studies, has provided a different and better explanation of why female candidates have no support from the registered female voters. Therefore, the problem of gender domination (especially males over females) in political representation also exists internally (among women), as dominant studies revealed.

Similarly, another explanation for the phenomenon is that factors like envy, jealousy, and other problems associated with interpersonal relations are common among women. Generally, most women would rather vote for or support men to win an election rather than their fellow women, in spite of their numerical strength at the polls (Ayabam, Ngara 2013) and this applies to Nigerian women. However, this has placed Nigerian men at an advantage vis-à-vis their female counterparts, when it comes to mobilizing support for elections. In Nigeria, Mrs. Sarah Jubril, the female presidential aspirant contested against former President Goodluck Jonathan and former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar at the People's Democratic Party presidential primaries preparatory to the 2011 general elec-



tions. At the end of the exercise, Sarah Jubril pulled only one vote, obviously her own vote. It was substantiated that even her female supporters who were delegates at the election did not vote for her (Ayabam, Ngara 2013). Additionally, most Nigerian women have developed a social stigma against politics where it is regarded as a dirty game and as such tend to wrongly perceive fellow women who are engaged in politics as arrogant and irresponsible. In this regard, their refusal to vote for fellow women is among the reasons that pulled the female candidates down. The resultant effect of the pulling-her-down syndrome has led most Nigerian women to leave politics in order to retain their image and not break their matrimonial home (for the married ones) (Nwabunkeonye 2014: 288).

In spite of the fact there is no country-wide data on the number of women who cast their ballot, the number of registered female voters showed an increase of women's participation in politics. Despite women's increased involvement in the Nigerian political sphere and legal commitments to gender equality, women remain marginalized in political life. In comparison to their performance in 2003 and 2007 where women attained three and seven percent of elected offices nation-wide, in 2011 they attained about eight percent. In their political campaigns, political parties used women's wings to reach out to female voters, and the wives of the main presidential, gubernatorial and other prominent candidates were actively engaged in campaigning. For example, in the PDP (Peoples Democratic Party) President Jonathan and his wife affirmed commitments to a policy of ensuring that 35 per cent of appointed positions (including ministerial posts) were reserved for women (Ayabam, Ngara 2013: 286). The wives succeeded in mobilizing female voters for their husbands but the promises made to women were not fulfilled till he left office in 2015.

Despite some progress in women's participation in politics, there are countries where such progress has not been achieved in the era of globalization. The lowest rates of female participation in elections are found mainly in countries in the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia. Female participation is lowest in Pakistan. Countries from diverse regions can be found in the middle range. Equal rates of participation were



found in Australia and Argentina. Some countries in the Middle East: Turkey and Yemen have almost equal rates of participation between female and male voters. Women are more active in elections than men in 21 countries, most notably Belarus, New Zealand, Russia and Trinidad and Tobago (Solijonov 2016: 31). Voting secrecy makes it difficult for election administrators to extract gender statistics from electoral results. While some countries, such as Australia, Costa Rica and India, do collect such data, most countries do not allocate the time and effort required to do so (Solijonov 2016: 33). However, even in Belarus, New Zealand, Russia and Trinidad, and Tobago, the active involvement of women in politics has not translated into equal participation of women in government or leadership. The explanation, therefore, should be shifted from active involvement in political activities to winning elections – the ultimate goal of political participation.

There were studies which revealed that registered female voters cast their ballot based on the candidate's gender, that is, gender was a major determinant in voting. A study found that women will support female candidates, even if it means sacrificing party identity (Marsh, McElroy 2009: 2). Evidence revealed from several other studies has suggested that women are more likely to support female candidates than are men (Burrell 1994; Studlar, Welch 1986). Dolan (1998) also found that minorities, the less religious, and the elderly are more likely to vote for women than other voters. McDermott (1998) found that women are more likely to support female candidates than are men although, somewhat surprisingly, only in House elections. Sanbonmatsu (2002) argued that the relationship is more nuanced. It was suggested that about half of voters have a baseline preference for one gender over another, and that women are more likely to have such a preference. That preference is more likely to be for female candidates. However, the findings of the studies have no empirical basis where female voters channeled their votes and ensuring that all or half of the female candidates won.

It has been observed that some of the factors contributing to the increasing rate of women's participation politics were the efforts of civil society organizations and Non-Governmental

Organizations in developing countries where democracy is still at a trial stage. This resulted in an increased number of female candidates competing in national elections in Papua New Guinea in the 2007 election. A total of 103 female candidates contested the 2007 national election (3.7 per cent of the total of 2759 candidates). This showed an upward trend in the number of female candidates in most post-independence elections 1972-2007 (Sepoe 2013: 141). Such a trend in the increase of women's participation in politics, however, has not led them to win key political offices because some of the female registered voters have no concern for the underrepresentation of women at different levels of government. Sepoe (2013: 145) explained the rationale behind the failure of female candidates to win some elective positions in the country. Female candidates were challenged by ordinary village women, who saw their lifestyle as distant from those of rural women. Some voters expressed the view that the candidates needed to be on the ground to experience villagers' hardships and understand their lives (a comment equally applicable to male candidates).

In Kerema District, Papua New Guinea for example, female candidates were defeated because women voters generally follow the dictates of their husband or male relatives; failure to stick by the family choice could result in rejection and conflicts (post-election events attest to this, where family relations have soured as a result of election choices). Cultural norms are strong and women are not taken seriously as leaders who can represent their people in parliament. In some cases, 'money politics' compel voters, including women, to vote for men (Sepoe 2013: 145). The survey indicated that women who registered as voters did not cast their ballot in favor of female candidates. Their choice of candidates was determined by male kin or hatred of female politicians who are socially distant from the rural female voters. The study revealed a mixture of cultural factors and self-choice which shapes the voting behavior of female registered voters. In an election where there are female contestants, these have contributed to the defeat of female candidates despite their efforts and participation in active politics and other electoral processes.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a study indicated that women were actively involved in the 2006 general elections, the first to take place in the country in more than thirty years. They made up the majority of voters, about 64 per cent, for the legislative elections. However, very few of them managed to get elected: eight percent at the National Assembly and eight and half percent in the Senate. Women were penalized by a distorted electoral system and biases in the composition of electoral lists. They also suffered from insufficient financial means, a lack of political experience and the mobilizing power to build a broad and strong electoral base (International Alert 2012: 8). This finding shows that despite being the majority of the registered voters who cast their ballot in the election, their number had not guaranteed victory for their fellow women. Furthermore, a faulty electoral system and weak economy were cited as some of the reasons hindering female candidates' performance in the elections.

In Nigeria, despite the challenges which impede female participation in governance and leadership (such as lack of financial resources needed to compete with men on an equal basis), the influence of patriarchy, lack of support by political parties, religious beliefs, security, and gender-based violence, women participated massively both as voters and candidates in the elections. There were 73 candidates for election to the office of President for the 2019 elections. Six women stood as presidential candidates. This was an improvement from the 2015 elections where only one woman stood as a presidential candidate. As of 2019, Nigeria was ranked 181st out of 188 countries in terms of female representation in parliament, with 20 (5.6 per cent) female Members of Parliament in the House of Representatives and seven (6.5 per cent) in the Senate. In the 2015 election, 270 women candidates ran for election to the House of Representatives, comprising 15.2 percent of all candidates. In 2019, the percentage of women candidates fell to 12.3 per cent, although the number of women candidates increased to 569. The Senate revealed a similar picture. In 2015, 128 women contested the election, comprising 17.2 percent of candidates. In 2019, 233 women ran for the Senate but represented only 12.6 per cent of candidates. In 2015, only



one (7.1 per cent) woman candidate contested the presidency, compared to six (8.2 per cent) women in 2019 (The Commonwealth 2019: 16). The findings of the Commonwealth have countered the narratives on the factors identified above as justification for low representation of women in political leadership. As democracy develops in the country, women participate in all aspects of political activities as well as the electoral process. Yet, a significant majority of the female voters have not developed the consciousness for women's development leading them to cast their ballot in support of female candidates. Therefore, this paper attempts to unpack what accounts for the lack of support for female candidates from female voters during elections in Nigeria.

In contrast to the findings of the Commonwealth from the 2019 General Elections, the European Union Monitoring Group explained the reasons for the failure of women to win the elective positions they contested for. First was the decrease in the number of female candidates across positions and second, the majority of the women contested under the platforms of unpopular and weak political parties. The EU Election Observation Mission (2019: 13) stated that compared to 2015, the percentage of female presidential candidates remained the same, and decreased by four percentage points for senatorial and House of Representative candidates, respectively to 12 and 11 per cent. Most female candidates were nominated by smaller parties, and therefore had less chance of being elected. The report has not explained the level of women's participation in the election beyond securing the nomination of their political parties. Similarly, it has not explained why female and other male voters cast their ballot on candidates based on the strength and popularity of the political parties at the 2019 General elections in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative design that is suitable for a study that focuses on individual and group issues, especially biological identity, socio-cultural settings, and experiences.

Purposive sampling technique was utilized to select participants for the study. The aim is to provide an in-depth explanation of what shapes or influences the voting behavior of women during the election which a significant percentage of registered voters and in some cases, the majority of those who cast their votes. The aim of qualitative research is not to generalize the findings of the study but to explain the meanings and interpretations of people's actions and behaviors. Seale (1999: 107) observed that the broad generalization that is inherent in the research logic of the hypothetico-deductive model is a foreign concept in qualitative analysis.

Similarly, reporting voting intentions of the electorate is descriptive, but reporting why some people plan to vote for a particular candidate and not for another candidate is explanatory (Babbie 2013: 92). This article used the already existing data of registered voters and voter turnout in different countries and in Nigeria, in particular, to explain why females did not vote for female candidates. In explaining the attitude of voting preference, choice, pattern or political attitude, it is important to examine and present findings within a context of the voter's preference and rates of voter turnout - existing statistics are relevant. Therefore, existing statistics can often provide an historical or conceptual context within which to locate original research (Babbie 2013: 307).

Based on the purposive sampling technique for the selection of participants who participated in the study, the researchers elicited data through Key Informant Interviews (KII) conducted with women who contested for an elective office and either won or lost. Also, In-Depth Interviews (IDI) were conducted with female voters who voted at least three times out of the six general elections held in Nigeria between 1999 and 2019 during an interval of four years. This enabled the researchers to select participants who had hands-on experience regarding the theme of the research. The researchers tried to avoid sampling study participants who lacked in-depth knowledge or information about the topic under investigation.

There are six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. In order to give a fair representation in the study, one State was selected

from each geopolitical zones. The selection was guided by the data provided by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for each State of the federation. On the basis of such data, States with the highest number of registered female voters and female candidates were selected from each geopolitical zone. During the interviews, the participants were asked to express their opinion, experience, and knowledge about the voting behavior of women voters regarding female candidates. Put differently, Williams (1976: 128) stated that the activity of describing the relation between one action and others in a context is equivalent to interpreting or explaining the meaning of that action.

The thematic style was used in the analysis of the qualitative data. This is because interactionist or constructivist perspectives focus on the individual in his natural environment. Constructivists hold that people differ in their experience and understanding of reality hence adult women who either contested for an elective position or participated in the electoral processes including voting. A social phenomenon cannot be understood outside its context, that is, it is context-bound. The idea is to examine the meaningful and symbolic content of qualitative data (Sunday n.d.: 26). This is in line with the assertion of Bryman and Burges (1994: 4) who state that after data collection and reflection in relation to a general issue of concern, the researcher generates “categories” into which the data is fitted.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF MAYOR FINDINGS

A total of ten Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted with female politicians who contested for elective positions in previous elections in Nigeria. Five KII were conducted with those who won and another five with those who were defeated at the polls; the aim was to have balanced information. Similarly, twelve In-Depth Interviews (IDI) were conducted with female voters in some selected states across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. That is, two participants

from Northcentral, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, South-South, and Southwest in order to gather rich data from different areas in an ethnic, cultural and religiously diverse country.

Women's participation in a Civic Duty

The majority of the female voters were of the view that they did not experience cultural or religious restrictions which inhibited them from participating in political activities. This informed their decision to obtain voters' cards and turn out to cast a ballot on an election day more than their male counterparts. As democracy become entrenched in Nigeria, more women became visible in political affairs like membership of political parties, political allies and civic duties such as voter registration and ultimately to cast a ballot on election day. Their level of participation was also reflected in how women were industrious and participating in community activities with passion and determination. This was evident in the increased number of women in politics and in those who turned out to exercise their franchise. Similarly, it was observed that enlightenment and awareness have contributed to the large participation of women in the electoral process. That is, women who obtained primary and secondary school education were more active when it comes to voter registration and ballot-casting in an election, compared to women with a university degree. However, the findings also revealed the existence of patriarchal influence in determining the candidate female relatives would cast their ballot for. Some of the participants interviewed stated that they were influenced by their male relations or husbands and ultimately chose to vote for their preferred candidate (against their wish) in an election. This implies that the influence of cultural factors and social relationships in shaping the choice of candidates for female voters still exists. Some of the interviewed female voters stated that they were lured by some male candidates with money to influence their choice of candidate on the day of the election. A respondent during an IDI stated that:

We were paid before we came out to vote. One of the wealthy candidates provided means of transportation to convey us to the polling center. It helped to influence the decision of some female voters to come out in large numbers to vote in favor of the candidate whom they were mobilized to cast their ballot for.

Another respondent during a KII who once contested and won a seat in an election revealed that:

Women in Nigeria were passionate about democracy that was why they developed the habit of political participation, especially in an election day. The majority of the eligible women came out and voted instead of participating in campaigns, rallies, meetings and debates. Women require little orientation and mobilization to influence their decision to come out and vote. They have the patience to wait in queue for long hours which men cannot endure.

However, a female voter during an IDI expressed that some of the registered female voters had cast a ballot for the candidate who offered them the highest amount of money. In all elections held in Enugu State from 1999 to 2019, women were the largest contingent of those who turned out to vote. On election day, male relations and husbands hardly came out to vote. However, as part of the culture in Nigeria where the husband dictates the choice of his wife among the candidates, some of the married women cast their ballot for candidates chosen by their husbands. A respondent in Ekiti State in Southwestern Nigeria, however, stated a different factor that influenced the voting choice of women in their area. At the polling booth, some women exchanged their voter's cards for money offered by agents of political parties. This implied that the large turnout of women on election day was partly money-motivated. Corroborating the assertion in Ekiti, a female member of parliament in Ekiti State averred that women involved in the electoral process because of the meager amount of money offered by politicians to influence their voting choice.

Conversely, in Northcentral Nigeria, the majority of the female voters interviewed during IDI sessions revealed their participation in civic duty began with the voter registration

exercise which had no monetary incentive from politicians or government officials to encourage prospective voters to register. This signified that the large turnout of women on election day was a continuation of their participation in civic duty. The findings show little difference in political orientation among women in Southwestern Nigeria and Eastern Nigeria.

From the assertions and opinions of the politicians and voters it could be deduced that money, culture, and education were the major factors that shape women's participation in civic duties and political activities. However, it does not mean that such factors have no influence on male voters - some candidates targeted women because of their commitment and dedication to participating in the national exercise which requires endurance like voter registration and voting on an election day. The exercises are usually ill-prepared and poorly organized by the election management body. During voter registration in Nigeria, prospective voters queue up under the scorching sun before being registered. Similarly, on election day, the late arrival of election materials and officials, as well as overcrowding of voters at the polling units, contribute to discouraging male voters who lack endurance (unlike their female counterparts). This explains the existence of the gender gap between all registered voters and those who turn out to cast their ballot in the areas surveyed in Nigeria.

Voting preference among female voters

The broad objective of the study is to explain why, despite an increased number of registered female voters, there is no commensurate number of elected female political officeholders. The majority of the female voters interviewed revealed that they have confidence and trust in male politicians and feel secure under their leadership more than they would under their female counterparts. A female voter in Kano State during IDI asserted that:

Most of the female politicians in this part of the country (North) were children of the elites who live all their life in affluence

either abroad or in cities. They do not know the plights and conditions of rural women. That is why we preferred our local men who are always with us in the villages. These are some of the factors that count against some female candidates on election day.

However, during a KII with a female politician who contested a seat for the National Assembly (House of Representative) and was defeated by a male candidate in Nasarawa State stated that:

Some of the female voters were after money and some female politicians have no financial wherewithal to share to voters like their male counterparts. Our number has no meaning since envy, jealousy and greed have prevented us from uniting against a common opponent. Look at what happened during the 2019 General Elections, in virtually all the polling units in our constituency, women were the majority of the voters who turned out to cast a ballot yet no single woman won even a State Assembly member in Nasarawa State.

Similarly, another female politician who won an election at the 2007 General Elections as State Assembly member in Nasarawa State explained that:

A major obstacle for women's political liberation in Nigeria is beyond structural inequality and socio-cultural factors but psychological frustration and hatred of women against a fellow woman. In this part of the world (Nigeria), women have deep resentment over the upward mobility of a fellow woman. What is happening in the political sphere is not only domination by the men but it is the women who surrendered their rights and opportunity to men where they preferred male candidates to females. Upon all our population, no woman won a single position in the entire state.

Additionally, the majority of female voters expressed a unanimous opinion regarding their preference of male candidates during general elections. They said that women who won positions in the previous elections have not demonstrated good leadership towards the emancipation of women. None of the female politicians who won the election into the national or state parliament made any attempt to initiate law or policy that would ameliorate the suffering of women – be it strategy

for poverty reduction, cultural impediments and other forms of exclusion in the community decision-making body.

DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed that two decades of uninterrupted democratic government in Nigeria has (to a greater extent) overcome some social and cultural factors which hindered increased female participation in politics and representation in government. In particular, the findings of this study have revealed that women have actively participated during voter registration and have also cast ballots in all the elections held in Nigeria in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019. Their participation, however, has not changed the dominance of men in terms of electoral victory and representation in both executive and legislative arms of government. This correlates with the submission of Das and Choudhury (2002: 146) who stated that, ideally, political participation allows expressing one's point of view and secures the greatest good for the greatest number. This means that the level of female participation in electoral processes ought to be reflected in their representation in political leadership in Nigeria.

The findings showed some recurrent assertions from the women interviewed: it is not structural or institutional problems that hindered the high rate of female representation in political leadership. It is instead the absence of identity consciousness that prevents female voters to rally around female candidates at the polls. The findings showed that women have a sizeable number of registered voters who participated in the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria. It could be deduced that if there had been identity consciousness among women, they might have won a lot of seats either in the parliament or in office across all tiers of government. Corroborating the findings of this study, a breakdown of registered voters by gender by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC, Nigeria) showed that out of 84,004,084 registered voters, 39.6 million (forty-seven percent) were female whereas 44.4 million (fifty-three) of the total registered voters were male (INEC



Factbook 2019: 3). The difference between the proportion of male and female voters is just 6 per cent. This does not commensurate with the number of positions or seats occupied by women in the areas studied. It is ironic that people with such a substantial population and voting power are underrepresented in government at a time when there was an increased number of female candidates who contested.

Furthermore, from the findings we can draw the conclusion that the female candidates' lack of money to give voters during electioneering campaigns and on election day has been attributed as one of the factors which contributed to the defeat of some female candidates at the polls. The use of money to buy votes during election time has led some women to vote for male candidates who offered them money instead of voting for female candidates and thus reduce the underrepresentation of women in government and political affairs. This is in line with the findings of Olorunmola (2015: 10) which concluded that the unimpressive representation of women is not a coincidence because at no other time since the transition from military rule to democracy in 1999 was there such open and massive use of money at elections as during the 2015 general elections.

Additionally, the findings further show that cultural, religious, money and emotional factors play significant roles in shaping the voting pattern, choice, and female participation in politics and government. This correlates with the observation of the PLAC (2018: 8) which stated that decreased female participation has been attributed to structural barriers that limit women's options to run for offices such as capacity deficit, low interest, lack of access to education and resources, unequal playing field, lack of internal party democracy and the high cost of campaigning. As Nigerian women continue to clamor for equitable representation, the indices of the current political structure in Nigeria now show that the realization is far from being possible. Though women constitute half of the population, the composition of the body of representation in government does not reflect the same proportion. The number of women who contested for different political offices at three tiers of government in Nigerian (Federal State and Local Gov-

ernment Councils) elections, however, attest to the fact that there is an increased involvement of women in partisan politics and in the electoral processes, specifically voter registration and voter turnout on election day but that it still has not in any way increased their number in government and strategic positions in the areas studied.

CONCLUSION

Drawing from the above, it can be concluded that cultural beliefs, the religious factor, and economic status have all combined to a decrease in female participation in politics and governance, and, in particular, victory in the electoral contest. Despite these encumbrances, a significant proportion of women are into party politics and involved in different stages of the democratic process: voter registration, political rallies and ultimately, elections. Therefore, such factors still exist but their influence has been significantly reduced in most parts of the country where people have a strong adherence to conservative religious and cultural dogmas that are against the leadership of women. This is common in Northern Nigeria where the majority of the population is Muslim.

There is an interplay between structural factors that impede the high rate of female participation in politics and but at the same time is not obtainable in governmental leaders and political appointments. This is mostly because of the negative perception from the side of men, and on the side of women; jealousy, dislike, and hatred of female candidates by eligible female voters further aggravating the plight of women in the face of male domination in political decision-making and leadership. The lack of identity consciousness among eligible female voters has led women to cast their ballot in favor of male candidates. Thus, as democracy advances, more complex issues begin to manifest themselves. In this regard, only women who are wealthy and influential like their male counterparts, can campaign vigorously and share money with the voters to win the election and represent women in government. This is not a healthy political development in an attempt to deepen



democracy in order to ensure women's inclusion in all spheres of leadership. Jealousy, hatred, and lack of a shared identity between female voters and female candidates have added another explanation for the low representation of women in governance and public spheres.

The implication of this study is that it has deepened the explanation beyond factors that are prevalent in the literature regarding women's participation in politics, leadership, and decision-making in developing democracies. This does not downplay the influence of such factors in shaping and influencing the underrepresentation of women in leadership affairs but emotional sentiments among female voters and candidates also worsen their poor performance in an electoral contest. Unpacking this will broaden the understanding of women's political thought, political behavior and voting behavior in Nigeria. The low rate of women in government is discouraging because women, since 1999, are active participants and members of political parties in Nigeria. They are visible in all political activities, which indicates a decline of mundane encumbrances which once constituted a threat to their involvement in the democratic processes, but it has not translated into electoral victory and the reduction of the dominance of men over women in government.

To explain why women are dominated by men in Nigeria's political spheres, among the other factors discussed above, is the absence of consciousness of their identity as women. The presence of such consciousness coupled with their numerical strength, would allow for the reduction of disparity between men and women in winning elections and representation in government. Women as a category, however, are not yet a class. This paper borrows from the explanation of class consciousness and class itself put forward by Karl Marx in order to analogically explain the lack of consciousness among women. A class is only really a class, a class "for itself" when it is also a social movement and when it has a consciousness of its mission and the organization to express that and bring it about (Blunden 2006: 4). This implies that when women in the areas surveyed have no such consciousness and are not organized to express or challenge their domination by



men, that can neither bring about changes nor diminish their marginalization.

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