



The Peculiar Role of Women in the Socio-Political System of Borno State Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined the peculiar role of women in the socio-political system of Borno State Nigeria. The general objective of the study is to examine the nature of women participation in politics. The specific objectives include; examining the cultural and religious barriers to women's participation in politics, and whether they receive support or not from their female counterparts. It is a descriptive survey. Data was collected from 384 respondents spread across the three senatorial zones. The subjects were selected using multi-stage sampling technique. 12 sessions (one in each of the selected ward) of focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted and questionnaire administered. The study revealed that Borno women are marginalized politically due to cultural and religious barriers as well as illiteracy. The role of the women was only that of registering and voting for election, very few are allowed to contest for elective positions. It is recommended that women should be empowered economically through credit scheme, and their participation made easier by way of subsidy, and awareness campaigns be done by the majority advantage women have

Key words; Role, Women, Socio-Political System



Introduction

Globally, the women folk constitute 50% of the population. The current percentage of male population in the world is 50.4% and that of the female is 49.6% contributing in vital ways in societal development (www.worldmetres.info/worldpopulation). Their roles include motherhood, home managers, community organizers, socio-cultural and political activist (www.worldpress.com).

Despite the fact that women form the majority of registered voters in Nigeria and Borno State in particular, they are not well represented in elective positions. Factors such as cultural and religious beliefs, ignorance and illiteracy, lack of economic empowerment have hindered women's participation in governance and leadership roles in politics (Sunday, 2013).

Women were denied their franchise even after independence. As a result, prominent female politicians like Hajia Gambo Sawaba in the North could not vote or be voted for. It was on August 11th of 1979 that women in Northern Nigeria were given the franchise or allowed to participate in political activities, while the women in the South were allowed to vote on 1st June of 1961 when Mrs. Margret Ekpo won a seat to the Regional House of Assembly, Mrs. Jenet Mokelu and Mrs. Young were members of the Eastern house of assembly. The late Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome kuti, though not a full politician, was a very strong force to reckon with in the politics of the Western Region. Hajia Sawaba waged a fierce battle for the political and cultural emancipation of women in the North of Nigeria. Gonyok, (2016). Ayodele (2010).

The view that women in politics matter is sustained by the following reasons, politics is an important arena of decision making. Individuals who hold official positions in government get to decide how to allocate scarce resources; politicians make political decisions that may help some people at the expense of others. Decisions by politicians often affect people's individual choice by encouraging some behavior and outlawing others, political power is a valuable good, and politicians hold power over other social institutions such as, holding a political position is to hold a position of authority. Quadiri (2016). Women in position influence decisions or issues that bother on women and impact positively on the lives of the female gender.

Generally women participate as voters, party supporters and usually attend rallies in large number some others contest for political offices, only a few women have been able to attain the highest political office (Ehanire – Danjuma 2005). Though women in Borno State face the same hindrances with women in other parts of the world, Borno women play a very active and vital role in shaping the direction of Nigerian politics far beyond the expected and recognition of the men. They travel long distances in buses for campaigns, and in some instances they trek long distances on foot to polling stations to vote for majority male candidates seeking political governance. Women are mobilized according to their wards and sensitized on who the preferred candidate should be. On the day of voting, women are always seen carrying their mats to the polling stations to wait in line to conduct their right to vote. It is in this process of politics that women leave their homes in a large number as compared to other times. None the less women from other parts of Nigeria have a higher level of freedom and authority but do not engage so much in campaigns and voting, because on the days of elections they rather go about other



activities in the guise that politicians have not delivered on their mandate and promises of a better life. This is not the same situation with their female counterparts in Borno State, where women actively participate in campaigns and elections.

The greater majority of the population is composed of Muslims, purdah and the culture of the people strongly abhors mixing between the two sexes which is viewed as an indication of lewdness. Only very few men can allow their wives to participate in elective positions (Sunday, 2013).

Women who are actively involved in politics are seen largely as loose women, none the less; women are out and about campaigning and voting the men into political office. Politicians by the way of politics, stay out late at night attending political meetings and rallies and sometimes sleep in hotels far away from their homes where they belong, and this too can serve as an inhibitor to women participation in politics, the above stated is not a problem to the men folk, thereby creating an edge to the men and a prerogative of the men folk (Arowolo, 2010).

Though politicians have not implemented the mandate given to the men, this has not deterred the women from active participation in the political process of the state.

Statement of the Problem

One of the pressing challenges facing democratic processes in Africa, Nigeria and Borno state is the problem of poor or minimal participation of women in position of leadership in politics. Generally speaking, So much has been written about the low participation of women in representative and democratic politics, but nothing is documented on the peculiar role of the women of Borno state in politics even when in actual sense they do not occupy many political and administrative positions. Nationally, In 2011 general elections seven female senators were elected out of one hundred and nine, nineteen in the Federal house of representative out of three hundred and sixty, Forty eight were in the state house of assembly out of nine hundred and ninety members. There was only one female representing jere in the Borno state house of assembly (www.inecnigeria.org).

There is no gain saying that women constitute the majority of the registered voters and are politically very active but they consistently remain sub-servient or are not in elective positions or matters of politics and it is expected that democracy presupposes equal representation for all stake holders. Women are often not in the consultation that leads to the development of political parties, politics, laws and implementation which will direct their participation in electoral process as candidates. This can be attributed to the fact that in Borno state, politics has traditionally been a male domain that women have found unwelcoming or even hostile because political rallies are characterized with violence, thuggery, high level of intimidation and most times political thugs take center stage. With in-fighting among members and opponents, none the less women in Borno state still participate actively in campaigns and elections.



Religious and cultural norms have placed women as men's subordinates, In Nigeria and Borno state particularly, traditional or patriarchal values remain strong, men frown at women who are in politics because the women are bestowed with the responsibility of care givers and the upbringing of children and the home.

Women generally lack the opportunity to acquire political experience, With the exception of close relatives of male politicians, women generally lack the political network for electoral success, though the women in Borno state as in most parts of Nigeria, do not have the opportunity to run for positions of governance, they exhibit a high rate of political participation in terms of campaigns and voting.

Despite all the cultural and religious hindrances that inhibit the women from being voted for into public office, the said hindrances encountered by women does not inhibit their participation to vote and campaigns.. It is expected that, though women have enjoyed a higher level of authority in southern Nigeria, they will be more involved in the scheme of things, men have always been dominant in the political structure with women playing sedentary roles Erunke, (2009) but most notably in Borno the women have participated in election and voting though they are not voted for.

Objectives of the Study

The study is set to examine the nature of participation on the part of women in the politics of Borno State. The specific objectives are to:

- 1) Examine how patriarchy, culture, religion has hindered women in being voted into leadership position
- 2) Examine how women can support their female counterparts in politics
- 3) Further study the role of government in encouraging the participation of women in politics.
- 4) Proffer solutions to government on the participation of women in leadership position

Significance of the Study

The research will add to knowledge in the peculiar nature of women participation in leadership positions in the politics of Borno state. The study will provide policy makers with institutional frameworks and policy inputs in the area of policy formulation in regard to policy formulation.

The research will also expose to government and varying female politician's tools that hitherto can catapult them into leadership positions.



Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is the 'Feminist Theory' Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical, fictional, or philosophical discourse. It aims to understand the nature of gender inequality. It examines women's and men's social roles, experiences, interests, chores and feminist politics in a variety of fields, such as Sociology and Anthropology, communication, psychoanalysis, home economics, Literature, education and philosophy.

Feminist theory focuses on analyzing gender inequality. Themes explored in feminism include discrimination, objectification (especially sexual objectification), oppression, patriarchy, stereotyping, art history and contemporary art, and aesthetics.

Feminist political theory is a diverse subfield of feminist theory working towards three main goals: to understand and critique the role of gender in how political theory is conventionally construed, to re-frame and re-articulate conventional political theory in light of feminist issues (especially gender equality), and to support political science presuming and pursuing gender equality.

It is a philosophy emphasizing the patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women, or, more specifically, social dominance of women by men. Radical feminism views patriarchy as dividing rights, privileges and power primarily by sex, and as a result oppressing women and privileging men.

Feminist political theory is a recently emerging field in political science focusing on gender and feminist themes within the state, institutions and policies. It questions the "modern political theory, dominated by universalistic liberalist thought, which claims indifference to gender or other identity differences and has therefore taken its time to open up to such concerns".

Women have been marginalized by cultural and religious barriers. Political and social inequalities do exist among men and women in Borno. This is succinctly captured by feminist theory.



METHODOLOGY

Design and Research Setting

The study design is a descriptive survey and the setting is Borno State of Nigeria.

Borno State is a state in north-eastern Nigeria. Its capital is Maiduguri (sometimes known as Yerwa). The state was formed in 1976 by the split of the North-Eastern State. Until 1991 it contained what is now Yobe State.

The state is dominated by the Kanuri ethnic group, and is an example of the endurance of traditional political institutions in some areas of Africa. There, the emirs of the former Kanem-Bornu Empire have played a part in the politics of this area for nearly 1000 years.

Borno State occupies the greater part of the Chad Basin and is located in the North-Eastern corner of Nigeria. The State shares borders with the Republics of Niger to the North, Chad to the North-East and Cameroun to the East. Within Nigeria, Borno State shares boundaries with Adamawa State to the South, Gombe State to the West and Yobe State to the North-West.

Agriculture and livestock farming which are the main stay of the state's economy have vast developmental potentials. The State is rich in millet, rice, cassava, date palms, fruits vegetables, sorghum, wheat, sweet potatoes, cowpeas, sugar cane, groundnut, cotton, gum Arabic and many others.

Mineral Resources include: Diatomite, Potassium/Sodium, Clay, Limestone and Uranium are found in Borno State. Crude oil is also explored in the Chad Basin Area.

The natural resources, history, rich traditions and cultural heritage of the people of Borno state provides ample tourist attractions which include - .Jaffy falls, Kuya; Sanda Kyarimi Park Zoo; Lake Aiau ;and the Shehu of Borno's Palace .



Study population

This consisted of adults of both sexes, aged between 18 and 50 years in all the selected Local Government Areas (LGA) in the state. Three Hundred Eighty Four (384) participants took part in various focus group discussion sessions and in-depth personal interview for the study.

Sample / Sampling Technique

A multi stage sampling was employed to select sample for the study. The multi stage sampling is done as thus:

Stage 1: the state is divided into three senatorial district. Each senatorial district is a cluster.

Stage 2: each senatorial district has average of eight L G As. Two (2) L G As are selected randomly from each senatorial zone. Making six (6) L G A s in all.

Stage 3: Two (2) wards are again randomly selected. This gives us a total of twelve (12) wards from the state.

Stage 4: proportionate sampling was used to select 384 subjects for the study.

The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (2012) Table for sample size determination. For a population which is equal to or greater than 1,000,000, the required sample size is 384.

Method of Data collection

These included focus group discussion (FGD) and use of Questionnaire. Averages of 12 FGD sessions (one in each of the selected communities) were conducted in each selected community and this was done to generate relevant questions for the Questionnaire and develop appropriate content for participation in politics.



Data Analysis

Narratives from the FGD were transcribed and translated from vernacular into English language. Commonly occurring responses were noted and codes and labels selected to represent common ideas/themes. Data from the questionnaire were entered on SPSS programme and analysed using descriptive statistics.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Age Category	No of Respondent	Percentage
18-25	96	25%
26-35	77	20%
36-45	153	40%
46-50	58	15%
Total	384	100
Sex		

Islam	269	70%
Christianity	115	30%
Traditional	00	0%
Occupation		Percentage
Civil servant	38	10%
Trader	65	17%
Student	58	15%
Applicant	50	13%
Housewife	173	45%
Total	384	100

Table 2: Who did you vote for in the 2015?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Male candidate	211	55%
Female candidate	173	45%
Total	384	100



Table 3: perception of women participation in politics

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Acceptable	154	40%
Unacceptable	211	55%
No comment	19	5%

Table 4: What Role did Women play in the 2015 Election?

Role	No	Percentage
Mobilization	115	30%
Candidate	23	6%
Supervising	54	14%
Voting	192	50%
Total	384	100

Table 5: Level of Women Participation in Politics in 2015 Election

Responses	No	Percentage
Poor	170	44%
Unsatisfactory	157	40%
Encouraging	43	11%
Satisfactory	14	4%
Total	384	100



RESULTS

Demographic characteristics of the Respondents

The socio-demographic characteristic of the respondents are on table one whose age range from 18-50 years, more females than male and most of them are illiterates (40%). They are predominantly Muslims, that is to say, the dominant religion in Borno is Islam. Table 3 shows that 50% of the respondents feel that women participation are unacceptable.

The Borno culture does not permit women in politics and indeed other outdoor activities because the woman is expected to be under purdah. Hence, you find that most of the respondents are housewives as shown in table 1. They do not engage in political activities.

Women do not receive support from their female counterpart. This true because they are economically empowered and are mostly illiterates. Table 1 show that 60% of the respondents are illiterates. Also Table 2 reveals that 55% of the females vote for male candidates.

The few women that participate in politic receive nothing or no form of encouragement from the government or political parties. Table 5 revealed that 70% of the respondents believed that women politicians do not receive any of incentive or encouragement from the government.

Discussion

Women in Borno are marginalized in terms of occupying political positions. Their role politically is restricted to registering to vote and voting during elections. There are a few women that have ascended to political positions. So far, there are only two women from Borno that have been elected to Federal House of Representative (Hajja Fanta Baba Shehu and Dr. Asabe Vilita Bashir).

The Borno culture sees women who participate in politics as infidels; hence a descent woman should not venture into it. This suggests lack of encouragement and support from even their female counterparts.



Furthermore, the level of illiteracy is very high in this part of the country. Level of participation in politics even among the literate population is due to cultural and religious barriers. This is further complicated by little or lack of government support and encouragement.

Recommendations.

In view of the findings of this study the following recommendations are made:

- 1) Government should make adequate legislation to create an enabling environment for women to compete with the men in the political field. The 35% affirmative action still remains a mirage.
- 2) The drive against poverty and illiteracy must be accompanied by measures specifically designed to empower women. Notably is in the economic area, by extending opportunities for full political participation and access to credit, and protecting women's property rights, including rights to land inheritance.
- 3) Women should be enlightened on the fact that they form the largest number of registered voters and as such they constitute a good number to be represented in leadership positions.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that women in Borno are marginalized and excluded from active participation in politics. Women participation in politics and decision making process cannot be enhanced without eradication of poverty based on sustainable economic growth, social development based on the principles of social justice.



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