

**DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS:
A STUDY OF SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT
AREAS IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The low level of political participation of women is becoming alarming and disturbing which is largely due to the discrimination and gender backlash they face. This hampers women from contributing their quota to the development of Nigeria. The study investigated the discrimination of women in politics in three selected Local Areas in Ekiti State. A total of 150 women participated in the study using a random and purposive sampling technique. Questionnaire were adopted as research instrument in gathering relevant information for the research. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences using tables and percentages. The findings of the study revealed that cultural beliefs, discrimination against women, money-politics, political violence, god-fatherism affect women participation in politics and relegate them politically. The study recommends that government and civil society groups should increase campaigns and awareness in promoting the involvement of women in politics and that a level-playing field should be allowed for both men and women participation in politics in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Discrimination, women, politics, equality, Ekiti state*

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Introduction

Gender inequality especially in the political arena is a serious challenge being faced by women in recent times (Osimen, Anegbode, Daudu and Oyewole, 2018). Women constitute about half of the population of Nigeria and play vital roles as mothers, producers, home managers, community organizers, and partisan political activists (Jain and Sen, 2005; Imhomoh, 2023). Despite these roles, the society has not given much credence to their invaluable contributions. That women are presently discriminated against and largely marginalized in many fields, especially in politics, is a known fact (Ake, Bamidele, Olowojolu, Oye and Ake, 2019). As early as the colonial era, the marginalization of women has been a standard practice in Nigeria's Patriarchal Political System and until 1976, women were not even allowed to vote in Northern Nigeria. This marginalization continued into the 4th republic. The negligible presence of women in institutionalized politics is equally apparent in their low participation as party executives, elected officials, and political appointees (Osimen, Anegbode, Daudu and Oyewole, 2018).

Democratization in Nigeria since 1999 has created openings that politicize gender identity; there remains both a dearth of political opportunities for women and severe self-reinforcing constraints on gender participation (Agbalajobi, 2021). Though the number is increasing, women remain grossly under represented. Nigerian women have encountered a number of problems while venturing into politics. There is large scale discrimination from the men folk, both in voting for candidates and in allocating political offices, whether government or party offices. More often than not, men constitute a larger percentage of party membership and this tends to affect women when it comes to selecting or electing candidates for elections, since men are usually the majority in the political party set-up. They tend to dominate the party hierarchy and are therefore at advantage in influencing the Party's Internal Politics (Ake, et. al 2019). The politics of Nigeria have been male dominated allowing women to become politically invisible. However, various moves to inculcate skills and knowledge that will liberate women from abject poverty socially, economically and politically are ongoing (Osimen, Anegbode, Daudu and Oyewole, 2018).

Despite challenges faced by women, it was discovered that women activism and advocacy, education of women, positivity on the part of successive governments towards women empowerment and interest of women to participate in politics is getting a lot of positive energy (Justice, 2015; Agbalajobi, 2021). Women in Ekiti State are also faced with the issues of being discriminated upon as most of the elective positions in the state are occupied by male politicians. Therefore, it is this phenomenon of discrimination against women in politics especially in

selected local governments in Ekiti State that this study seeks to address.

Literature Review

Given the encouraging data from across the continent, Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, has not only failed to achieve significant progress in terms of women's participation in parliament and cabinet appointments, but has also continuously slipped in worldwide rankings (Verge and Fuente, 2014). Three women were elected to the Senate and 12 to the House of Representatives when the era of democratisation began in 1999. After two elections, the number of women in the Senate increased to eight in 2007, but then decreased to seven in 2011. Seven women were elected to the Senate in 2015, and 20 to the House of Representatives. Four years later, there were just 11 women in the lower house. The national average for women's participation in elected and appointive posts has been around 6%, which is lower than the West African sub-regional average of 15%. According to the 2021 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, Nigeria has a 10.3% representation of women in ministerial positions (three out of 29) and 5.8% among members of parliament, ranking 149th (out of 155 countries) in terms of political empowerment. It is ranked 32nd out of 35 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Agbalajobi, 2021).

Nigeria ranks 139th out of 156 countries in the overall global gender gap index for 2021 (with a 63 percent gender gap) based on the average scores of the indicators that make up the Index: educational attainment (0.806), health and survival (0.967), economic participation and opportunity (0.687), and political empowerment (0.687). (0.047). Nigeria, unlike many other African countries, does not have a gender quota system in place. This is significant because gender quotas and proportional representation policies are widely regarded as effective strategies for increasing women's political participation in general (Agbalajobi, 2021) and specifically expanding access to the legislative process (Bush, 2011; Franceschet and Piscopo, 2008) and leadership in political parties (Verge and de la Fuente, 2014).

Women's under-representation in electoral politics is a nationwide issue in Nigeria, but it is particularly acute in northern Nigeria. According to research by The Sunday Punch, a widely circulated national newspaper, no woman has ever been elected to the state House of Assembly or the national House of Representatives in Kano (a populous northern state). In 2019, women were not elected to the House of Assembly in 17 northern states, while the two major political parties (PDP and APC) did not have female candidates in 19 states (Eniola, 2016) and only 48 women were elected into Houses of Assembly across all States in Nigeria in the 2023 elections (Amata, 2023). Northern Nigeria's

under-representation of women is similar to what many African countries experienced before quotas opened up political space for women, resulting in increasing female legislative representation (Tripp and Kang, 2008). Despite the lack of explicit quota regulations, there are a number of initiatives underway in Nigeria to address the low level of female participation in politics. In the run-up to the 2011 election, the Ministry of Women and Social Development established the Nigerian Women Trust Fund to support 230 female candidates financially. Patience Jonathan, the First Lady at the time, launched the Women for Change Initiatives to encourage women to get involved in politics (Ake, et. al. 2019).

According to its then chairman, Professor Attahiru Jega, the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) in 2014) introduced a gender policy to demonstrate its commitment to sustainable and inclusive participation of all, irrespective of gender, both within the Commission and in the wider political system (Justice, 2015). Several foreign civil society organisations have supported capacity-building programmes to mobilise and mentor female politicians in the country's largest cities, in addition to local initiatives. For example, UN Women, the worldwide champion for gender equality, held a conference of political parties in 2018 to discuss effective measures to overcome women's political helplessness and under-representation in party structure and governance (Arowolo and Aluko, 2010; Okoosi-Simbine, 2012; Pogeson, 2012; Orizu, 2018).

Comparatively, the rate at which men participate in politics is incredibly higher than their female counterparts. This is not to say, however, that there has not been a progressive increase in the trend of women participation in politics in terms of appointments and elections, but the participation is considered low considering the international standard of 30% benchmark. In 1992 for instance, under the Babangida's administration, out of 300 gubernatorial aspirants, only 8 were women representing 2.6% and none of these women was elected as governor (Iloh and Ikenna, 2009). Research has shown that exclusion of women in the party executives contributes in no small measure to the marginalisation of women in politics, especially during party nominations (Ako-Nai, 2005; Muhammed, 2006; Okoosi-Simbine, 2006; Illoh and Ikenna, 2009).

Women's presence in the Federal Executive Council had never topped 5% until 1999 (Nda, 2003; Illoh and Ikenna, 2009). Between 1999 and 2003, the Obasanjo administration took a bold move by appointing four women out of 29 senior ministers (13.7 percent) and three out of 18 junior ministers (16.6%).

Despite the argument that political participation of women in Nigeria rose in 2003 and 2007, it is, however, restricted maximally to the appointive positions as none of the women who contested governorship election got elected. Also, the few that contested did so under unpopular parties as major political parties discriminated against the candidacy of women. However, Ekiti, Ogun, Osun and later Anambra states produced female Deputy-Governors (Iloh and Ikenna, 2009). By and large, women are gradually being conscientised and mobilised into participating in politics, the move that has increased their participation in politics. It is still believed that efforts should still be channeled towards awakening women into productive and active participation in politics in order to realise the full productive capacity of Nigerian preponderant population. This becomes imperative as irresistible role of women is capable of building strong democratic institutions that are acceptable and durable (Ake et. al, 2019). (Agbalajobi, 2021).

Method

The study took place in three selected Local Government Areas of Ekiti State, Southwestern Nigeria. The study adopted the quantitative method of data collection and 150 structured questionnaire were administered. 50 female politicians were randomly selected and participated in the study as respondents in each of the Local Government Areas, making a total number of 150 respondents. They were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Age	18-29 years	31	20.7
	30-39 years	50	33.3
	40-49 years	57	38.0
	50 years and above	12	8.0
Marital Status	Single	38	25.3
	Married	96	64.0
	Divorced/Separated	16	10.7
Local Government Area	Ado LGA	50	33.3
	Ikole LGA	50	33.3
	Oye LGA	50	33.3
Religion	Christian	129	86.0
	Muslim	8	5.3
	Traditional	13	8.7
Education	SSCE/GCE	61	40.7
	ND/NCE	59	39.3
	HND/Bsc	30	20.0

Source: Fieldwork 2023

After the questionnaire administration, those that were deemed valid were collated and processed to obtain data for the study. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and presented in frequency distribution and percentages.

Table 1 above shows that majority of the respondents who accounted for 38% of the total samples are within the age bracket of 40-49, 33.3% fall within the age bracket of 30-39 years, 20.7% are within the age range of 20-29 years, while 8% were within 50 years and above. Most of the research participants are Christians accounting for 86% while Muslims are 5.3% and traditional worshippers were 8.7%. Regarding the marital status, 64% of respondents are married, 25.3% are single, while 10.7% are either divorced or separated. In terms of educational qualification, 40.7% had an SSCE or GCE certificate, 20% are either having a BSc or HND degree, while 39.3% are either having an NCE or ND degree. The implication of this finding is that as far as age and educational attainment is concerned, women are eminently qualified for political positions.

Table 2: Relationship between cultural/traditional beliefs and women's participation in politics.

		SA	%	A	%	U	%	D	%	SD	%
1	Women are seen as household keepers and not to be involved in politics.	51	34	47	31.3	24	16	15	10	13	8.7
2	The society does not believe in the successful regime of women in leadership roles.	48	32	49	32.7	28	18.7	12	8	13	8.7
3	The society perceives women to be submissive in nature.	34	22.7	63	42	35	23.3	9	6	9	6
4	The cultural perception is that women cannot effectively take up leadership titles and roles.	50	33.3	55	36.7	22	14.7	13	8.7	10	6.7
5	Men are only to get good jobs and be in politics as it is the norms of the society.	32	21.3	36	24	32	21.3	26	17.3	24	16
6	Women are only to act in a supportive capacity.	45	30	44	29.3	22	14.7	20	13.3	19	12.7
7	Cultural beliefs are that men are superior to women.	43	28.7	38	25.3	26	17.3	17	11.3	26	17.3
8	As a woman, cultural norms relegate them politically.	51	34	44	29.3	20	13.3	16	10.7	19	12.7

Source: Fieldwork 2023

Table 2 shows the opinion of respondents on relationship between cultural/traditional beliefs and women's participation in politics. 34% strongly agreed that women are seen as household keepers and not to be involved in politics, 31.3% agreed, 16% were not sure, 10% disagreed, while 8.7% strongly

disagreed. 32% strongly agreed that the society does not believe in the successful regime of women in leadership roles, 32.7% agreed, 18.7% were not sure, 8% disagreed, while 8.7% strongly disagreed. 22.7% strongly agreed that the society perceives women to be submissive in nature, 42% agreed, 23.3% were not sure, 6% disagreed, while 6% strongly disagreed. 33.3% strongly agreed that the cultural perception is that women cannot effectively take up leadership titles and roles, 36.7% agreed, 14.7% were not sure, 8.7% disagreed, while 6.7% strongly disagreed. 21.3% strongly agreed that men are only to get good jobs and be in politics as it is the norms of the society, 24% agreed, 21.3% were not sure, 17.3% disagreed, while 16% strongly disagreed. 30% strongly agreed that women are only to act in a supportive capacity, 29.3% agreed, 14.7% were not sure, 13.3% disagreed, while 12.7% strongly disagreed. 28.7% strongly agreed that cultural beliefs are that men are superior to women, 25.3% agreed, 17.3% were not sure, 11.3% disagreed, while 17.3% strongly disagreed. 34% strongly agreed that as a woman, cultural norms relegate them politically, 29.3% agreed, 13.3% were not sure, 10.7% disagreed, while 12.7% strongly disagreed. Data generated from this table implies that women are generally relegated to supportive roles in the realm of governance and politics.

Table 3: Factors Affecting Women Participation in Politics

		SA	%	A	%	U	%	D	%	SD	%
1	Women are often victims of gender discrimination in politics.	37	24.7	60	40	26	17.3	13	8.7	14	9.3
2	As a woman, abuse from the other gender must be tolerated.	51	34	36	24	36	24	12	8	15	10
3	The political situation of the country requires a lot of money to contest for positions which does not give room for women to participate actively.	39	26	48	32	21	14	27	18	15	10
4	Unequal distribution of resources and opportunities	46	30.7	40	26.7	15	10	26	17.3	23	15.3
5	Godfatherism in politics is a barrier to women participation in politics	48	32	45	30	22	14	18	12	18	12
6	Violence in politics has reduced women attaining political power and relevance	48	32	44	29.3	23	15.3	17	11.3	18	12
7	Lack of Support from men	43	28.7	55	36.7	21	14	19	12.7	12	8

Source: Fieldwork 2023

Table 3 shows the opinion of respondents on factors affecting women participation in politics. 37% strongly agreed that women are often victims of gender discrimination in politics, 40% agreed, 26% were not sure, 13.8% disagreed, while 14% strongly disagreed. 34% strongly agreed that the presence of abuse from the other gender, 24% agreed, 24% were not sure, 8% disagreed, while 10% strongly disagreed. 26% strongly agreed that the political situation of the country which requires a lot of money to contest does not give room for women to participate politically, 32% agreed, 14% were not sure, 18% disagreed, while 10% strongly disagreed. 30.7% strongly agreed that there is an unequal distribution of the nation's resources and opportunities as a result of gender discrimination, 26.7% agreed, 10% were not sure, 17.3% disagreed, while 15.3 % strongly disagreed. 32% strongly agreed that godfatherism is a great obstacle for women in politics, 30% agreed, 14% were not sure, 12% disagreed, while 12% strongly disagreed. 32% strongly agreed that political violence prevents women from active participation in politics, 29.3% agreed, 15.3% were not sure, 11.3% disagreed, while 12% strongly disagreed. 28.7% strongly agreed that lack of support from men in preference to their gender has reduced women attaining political power and relevance, 36.7% agreed, 14% were not sure, 12.7% disagreed, while 8% strongly disagreed. Findings from this table shows that discrimination against women under various forms have been a stumbling block to women aspiration in politics.

Table 4: How to address Women's Participation in Nigerian Politics

		SA	%	A	%	U	%	D	%	SD	%	
1	Gender discrimination should be outlawed and curbed.	57	38	57	38	17	11.3	7	4.7	12	8	
2	Women should be allowed more elective positions in governments.	47	31.3	59	39.3	28	18.7	8	5.3	8	5.3	
3	Cultural norms relegating women's involvement in politics should be abolished and eradicated.	54	36	57	38	24	16	7	4.7	8	5.3	
4	Men and women should be given equal rights in the Nigerian political system.	49	32.7	63	42	30	20	4	2.7	4	2.7	
5	Women should be properly educated and sensitized on the need to participate more in politics.	48	32	66	44	26	17.3	4	2.7	6	4	
6	Government should create political awareness on more political representation of women political participation.	51	34	59	39.3	21	14	10	6.7	9	6	
7	More laws should be signed guaranteeing women political interests.	48	32	60	40	28	18.7	7	4.7	7	4.7	

Source: Fieldwork 2023

Table 4 above shows the opinion of respondents on how to address women's participation in Nigerian Politics. 38% strongly agreed that gender discrimination should be outlawed and curbed, 38% agreed, 11.3% were not sure, 4.7% disagreed, while 8% strongly disagreed. 31.3% strongly agreed that women should be allowed more elective positions in governments, 39.3% agreed, 18.7% were not sure, 5.3% disagreed, while 5.3% strongly disagreed. 36% strongly agreed that cultural norms relegating women's involvement in politics should be abolished and eradicated, 38% agreed, 16% were not sure, 4.7% disagreed, while 5.3% strongly disagreed. 32.7% strongly agreed that men and women should be given equal rights in the Nigerian political system, 42% agreed, 20% were not sure, 2.7% disagreed, while 2.7% strongly disagreed. 32% strongly agreed that women should be properly educated and sensitized on the need to participate more in politics, 44% agreed, 17.3% were not sure, 2.7% disagreed, while 4% strongly disagreed. 34% strongly agreed that government should create political awareness on more political representation of women political participation, 39.3% agreed, 14% were not sure, 6.7% disagreed, while 6% strongly disagreed. 32% strongly agreed that more laws should be signed guaranteeing women political interests, 40% agreed, 18.7% were not sure, 4.7% disagreed, while 4.7% strongly disagreed. Data obtained from the table above revealed that all forms of gender discrimination against women should be eradicated in order to allow women take active party in politics in Nigeria.

Discussion of findings

The analysis of the study data revealed information on the discrimination of women in politics from selected local government areas in Ekiti state. The findings revealed a strong relationship between cultural beliefs and women participation in politics. It is culturally held that the women are subservient to men and should serve men at home, take care of children and not seek political powers for domination. The study revealed that the Nigerian society is culturally patriarchal as far as politics is concerned. A society ruled and dominated by men over women and which has given rise to women being looked upon as household wives who should not even take the lead in decision making process in households not to talk of coming out to vie for political positions. The findings of the study is in consonance with the works of Arowolo and Aluko (2010), who reported that Nigerian husbands are often hesitant to support their wives' wishes to participate in active politics, and women themselves believe that political participation would interfere with their ability to perform their primary and cultural responsibilities as home managers, caregivers, resulting in broken homes and the breeding of irresponsible

children. The study is also in line with the work of the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC, 2018), a Nigerian non-governmental organisation, where it was reported that because of gender ideology, cultural traditions, and established societal roles ascribed to women and men has made it difficult for women to break into political positions. The study also reported an increase in gender based violence limiting the capability of women to participate in politics. The study findings is in line with the work of Agbalajobi (2021) who assert that aside other general factors, gender-based violence is one of the problems for non-participation of women in politics. It was also revealed that abuse and stigmatization constitute barriers for women participation in politics. Following the way that politics is played in Nigeria, it is perceived that a woman should be ready to compromise her moral values so as to be recognized for political positions. Consequently, women venture into politics are sometimes looked upon as shameless and promiscuous and this has made it difficult for husbands to allow their wives to participate in politics. This finding is in agreement with Osimen et. al. (2018) which held that women in politics are perceived to be promiscuous.

Furthermore, the study revealed that to participate actively and contest for positions in Nigeria requires a lot of money and this has limited the participation of women since they cannot match the financial strength of the men. The unequal distribution of the nation's resources as a result of gender discrimination has continued to hinder women from having the financial muscle to engage the men. Also, the study revealed that political violence has always characterized the political landscape in Nigeria since the return of democracy. This is a huge barrier to female participation as the female gender cannot withstand political violence like their male counterparts. Godfatherism is a serious factor in Nigeria's politics. It is the godfather that determines who gets what in politics. The godfather, in the arbitrary use of his power and influence often make demands that may be difficult for women to fulfil. Lack of support for women by men in preference for their gender was also identified as a barrier to women participation in politics as women cannot do it alone.

As a result of the above, the study revealed that there is need to address the discrimination against women in politics due to the consequences. Women are seen to be conservative and less corrupt than men. Women are seen to be better managers as revealed in the study. Therefore, a political landscape that allows for equal political opportunities between male and female will lead to an accelerated national development and place Nigeria within the comity of developed nations of the world. In view of this, the study makes the recommendations below.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made with regards to ensuring the participation of women in Nigerian politics.

1. Government at all levels and civil society groups should increase campaigns and awareness in promoting the involvement of women in politics in order to end the cultural stereotypes and discrimination against women in politics. Women should be properly educated and sensitized on the need to participate more in politics as a way of contributing to national development.
2. The practice of godfatherism that places impossible conditions for women to participate actively in politics should be eradicated. Women who merit positions and are ready to serve should be considered rather than the handpicking of candidates by godfathers.
3. The use of money by men to push women aside in politics should be discouraged. Women should be allowed to participate in the aspiration for political offices by obtaining forms free of charge to serve the nation.
4. Political violence through the use of thuggery scares women away from politics. Government should ensure a violence-free electoral process in order to encourage women's participation in politics.

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