

Electoral Politics and Women Participation in Nigeria: A Case Study of 2003, 2007 & 2011 General Elections In Ekiti State.

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Abstract: *Nigerian women are known to play vital roles as mothers, producers, time managers, community organizers and socio-political activists. But despite the major roles they play and their population, the society has not given recognition to this and to the fact that they are discriminated against. The Nigerian society being a patriarchal one, clearly manifests the social categorization of women implicit as being inferior to men and therefore, not capable or suitable for political leadership. This study therefore, is an assessment of women participation in electoral politics using 2003, 2007 and 2011 general elections in Ekiti State, Nigeria as its focus.*

Available data on the elections were collected from the electoral body responsible for the conduct of elections in the country- Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)- to determine the level of involvement of women in the elections. It was discovered in the study that, despite the political enlightenment campaigns, women's participation in electoral politics is still at the lowest ebb. The study therefore highlights the factors that are inhibiting women active participation in electoral politics and makes suggestions on the way forward.

I. Introduction

Politics is viewed as a phenomenon that evokes a great deal of apprehension and uneasiness among ordinary citizens all over the world (Olufemi 2003). The situation in Nigeria has gone to a level that the popular perception of politics is that of a "dirty game". This stems from the unwholesome behaviours of politicians, their political manoeuvres and manipulations, electoral practices, violence and killings. The tendency is for decent people to want to steer clear of politics and politicians as much as possible. Yet, every human being is a political animal; politics affects our lives in every available facet. Participation of citizens in competitive politics is a distinguishing feature of democracy. Sequel to the above, the participation of women in partisan politics has also been used as a key indicator for measuring the general level of democratization in any given society. This is so because, being a historically oppressed and marginalized group – but ironically constituting half of the national population – their level of involvement in political activities is crucial to the understanding of the level of political development in any country.

This paper addresses itself to women participation in electoral politics in Nigeria with particular reference to 2003, 2007 & 2011 general elections in Ekiti State. The paper highlights the factors militating against active women participation in electoral politics and makes suggestions on the way forward.

1.2 Conceptualising Election and Political Participation

Election originated with democracy in order to make leadership succession easy by allowing the citizenry to participate in the selection of their leaders. Also, Omotoso (2002) conceives election as one among several tools used by power contenders to gain office, which also provides the opportunity for smooth transfer of political power from individuals to individuals and from groups to groups. Thus, elections ensure the participation of citizens in the democratic process both as candidates and electorate. It is through the system of elections that the people express their wishes especially in the choice of those who govern them. Moreover, election as the major source of political mandate, serves both as a reminder of campaign promises by candidates and both legal and moral ground for the candidates to remain accountable to the electorate (Olaoye, 2007). However, Anifowose (2003) summarises the functions of elections to include recruiting politicians and public decision-makers; making governments; influencing policy decision; educating voters; building legitimacy; strengthening elites; providing succession in leadership; and extension of participation to many people. It has also been observed that countries with developed economies are expected to have higher level of electoral participation because of its consequences on participation. The more economically strong citizens are, the higher the potential for mobilizing them for political participation.

Participation of citizens in electoral politics on the other hand, is not only a civic responsibility, but a basic ingredient of democracy. In particular, full participation within the local institutions contributes to the creation of community solidarity because everyone feels involved in what is going on relative to his/her welfare. Thus, individual full participation boils down to popular participation and is expected to express their wishes on issues of governance.

Thus, it can be argued that political participation is not only relevant to the individual but also crucial to the state or nation as its survival is contingent on the extent to which the citizens are involved in its activities. One can say here that the extent of individual participation in the political process also gives a basic idea of the level of development of that society; although the level of development of a particular society can sometimes influence the extent of political participation of the citizenry. Nevertheless, political participation which entails the voluntary involvements of the citizens in the choice of leaders and in the policy formulation and implementation process of their society affords the people a sense of belonging and a say in how they are being governed. Political participation, according to Igwe (2002):335 is the degree and forms of involvement of the people in governance and related institutions of society, such as the economy and culture. In its active sense, it involves participation in political campaigns and debates, attending caucus or strategic meetings of political parties, voting during elections, contesting, attending meetings and rallies as candidates for elections and holding of party positions. Okolie's (2004:53) definition goes beyond this to include freedom of expression, association, right to free flow of communication, influence decision making process and right to social justice. According to him, it also expresses such rights to demand for better social and health service, better working conditions and increase in wages, amongst others.

Epelle&Oriakhi (2003: 60-61) reduce political participation to the following activities:

- (((1) Voting at elections,
- (((2) Belonging to a political party,
- (((3) Contesting for positions within the party;
- (((4) Vying for positions in the state whether at the local, regional or national levels,
- (((5) Attending party meetings and campaigns,
- (((6) Holding and expressing political opinions and
- (((7) Belonging to community-based organisations or other non-governmental organisations(NGOs) that have leadership interest.

A critical look at the above activities shows that Nigerian women have been involved mainly at the first one and lately the last one, that is, voting at general elections after which they retire to their kitchens only to re-appear on the voting queue during the next election; and belonging to community-based organisations and NGOs which is tied to their getting empowered economically rather than politically. Women are increasingly associating with these groups in a bid to take advantage of the services rendered by the associations. Supporting this, Soetan (1995: 87) in her findings, submits:

Majority of the members of women's association and non-members agreed that access to resources would be difficult without membership of women's associations. It is thus quite clear that women's associations do indeed empower their members economically. They are recognized as the appropriate organs of empowerment for women within their communities.

However, before a political action can occur, the political actor must have picked up relevant stimuli from the environment. The general proposition relating stimuli and political participation is such that the more stimuli about politics a person receives, the greater the likelihood that he/she will participate in politics, and the greater the depth of his/her participation (Milbrath, 1965). Stimuli exist in the environment of a political actor, and the exposure to him/her increases the quantity and sharpness of political knowledge, stimulates interest, and contributes to the decisiveness of political choices. (Quadri, 2004).

In relating political attitudes to the structure of politics, the political culture of a nation becomes significant. Political culture may refer to specific political orientations- attitudes towards the political systems and its various parts, and attitudes towards the role of self in the system (Almond & Verba, 1963). Hence, the political culture of a nation is the particular distribution of patterns of orientation towards political objects among the members of the nation. Amongst the factors determining this attitude is the early socialisation experience which significantly affects an individual's basic personality and predispositions and may, therefore affect his/her political behaviours. The non-political authority pattern to which an individual is exposed also affects his/her political behaviour. The authority patterns in the family are the first exposure to authority. In many societies, (Nigeria inclusive), women are raised from childhood not to exhibit any form of ideological tendencies that could prepare them for leadership roles. They are trained from birth to grow up to be good wives and mothers. Ogunlesi (2000) gives an insight into this:

The traditional role of women is at the domestic level, to look after their husband and assist on the farm – in rural communities and augment the family income by carrying out some trading. Young girls assisted their mothers in cleaning the house,

looking after their younger ones. (Ogunlesi (2000) as cited in Adeyemi&Adeyemi 2003:365)

Thus, due to no fault of theirs, women see most things as the exclusive preserve of men. Nda (2003:336), contributing further on the structure of hierarchy within the family, noted that it cultivates attitudinal traits of male dominance and female subservience which are often transposed into formal sectors.

1.3 Descriptive Analysis of Ekiti State

Ekiti State of Nigeria was created on 1st Oct., 1996 by the late Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, General Sani Abacha GCON in a nationwide broadcast to mark the 36th Independence anniversary of Nigeria. The state carved out of Ondo State, covers the former twelve local government areas that made up the Ekiti Zone of old Ondo State. However, Ekiti State, on creation took off with sixteen local government areas, having had additional four carved out of the old ones. They are culturally homogeneous and speak a dialect of Yoruba language known as Ekiti. The local dialect is spoken with slight variations in different communities, but this does not prevent Ekiti indigenes from understanding one another. The Ekiti whose ancestors migrated from Ile-Ife as a people, form one of the largest ethnic groups in Yoruba land. All towns in Ekiti take a common suffix, "Ekiti" after their names. The state can boast of more than 127 large and small, ancient and modern towns located on hills and valleys that characterize the state from which the confinement takes its name, Ekiti that is "Okiti" meaning hill. Ekiti people are predominantly farmers but some women engage in cottage activities like mat-making, weaving, hair-plaiting etc. The people of Ekiti are hardworking, upright, studious & very articulate. They are mostly Christians & Muslims (Fasuan, 2002).

At its inception, Ekiti State had Capt. Inuwa Bawa at the helm of affairs. This is followed by Atanda Yusuf as its military administrators before the return to civil rule in 1999. Elections were conducted into the State House of Assembly, local government areas, House of Representatives, The Senate and for the office of the Governor. Chief Niyi Adebayo emerged the winner of the gubernatorial election in 1999 and was sworn in on 29th May, 1999 as the first Executive Governor of the state. Other general elections were conducted in the state in 2003 which brought in Mr. Ayo Fayose as the Governor. However, he could not complete his term in office due to his impeachment by the State House of Assembly in 2006. Consequently, former President Olusegun Obasanjo declared a state of emergency on the state in a national broadcast and imposed an Administrator (Gen. Tunji Olurin (rtd)) on the state on 19th October, 2006. On April 27, 2007 Olurin was replaced by Tope Ademiluyi as acting Governor. In 2007 elections were conducted at various levels, Governor Segun Oni was declared the winner of the gubernatorial election and was sworn-in as the governor on 29th May, 2007. But his government was ousted on 15th Oct. 2010 by the judgement of the Election Tribunal sitting in Ilorin which declared Dr. Kayode Fayemi as the winner of the rerun election of 2009. During these periods, the percentage of women who got involved in the contests was far below that of men as would be discussed subsequently.

1.4 Analysis of Female Contestants in Ekiti State

Our focus of study in this paper is on the 2003, 2007 and 2011 general elections in Ekiti State. During these elections, the percentage of women who got involved in the contests was far below that of men as shown in the tables below:

Table 1: 2003 Senatorial Elections: Distribution of Contestants on Gender Basis

No of seats	Total no of male contestants	Total no of female contestants	% of female contestants	% of Male contestants	No female elected
3	16	3	15.8	84.2	Nil

Source: INEC, Ado-Ekiti

Table 2: 2003 House of Assembly Elections: Distribution of Contestants on Gender Basis

No of seats available	Total no of contestants	Total no of male contestants	Total no of female contestants	% of female contestants	% of Male contestants	No of female elected
26	145	140	5	3.4	96.6	1

Source: INEC, Ado-Ekiti

Table 3: 2003 Governorship Elections: Distribution of Contestants on Gender Basis

No of seats	No of contestants	No of male contestants	No of female contestants	% of female contestants	% of Male contestants
1	8	8	-	-	100

Source: INEC, Ado-Ekiti

In the 2003 Senatorial Elections in the state, Table 1 shows that there were only three women which are 15.8% of the total number of contestants (19) while 84.2% was the percentage of male contestants. None of the female contestants made it to the Senate. Table 2 also presents 2003 House of Assembly Elections with only

five female contestants (3.4%) out of the 145 contestants that contested for the twenty-six seats in the House while the remaining 140 contestants were men (96.6%) and only one woman got elected. In the same year, there was no female contestant in the Governorship Elections as seen in Table 3.

However, in 2007 there was an increase in the number of women that participated in the electoral contest in the state but only three women got elected out of the eighteen female contestants that participated in the general elections. The analyses of the eighteen contestants are shown in Tables 4-7.

Table 4: 2007 Governorship Elections: Distribution of Contestants on Gender Basis

Post contested for	No of all Contestants	No of Male Contestants	No of Female Contestants	% of Female Contestants	% of Male Contestants	No of Female elected
Governorship	13	13	-	-	100	-
Deputy Governorship	13	10	3	23	77	-

Source: INEC, Ado-Ekiti

Table 4 indicates that there was no female candidate for the Governorship Elections and only three men contested for Deputy Governorship which is 23% of the total contestants (13). None of the three women got elected as Deputy Governor. However, there was a re-run election through the judgement of the Election Tribunal in 2009 in which Engr. Segun Oni and his Deputy, Chief Tai Lawal were declared as winners. But this was contested by the Action Congress of Nigeria candidate and the Court of Appeal in Ilorin later declared the ACN gubernatorial candidate as winner and thereafter a Female Deputy Governor emerged on 16th October, 2010 in Ekiti State in person of Mrs. Funmilayo Adunni Olayinka. Unfortunately, the Ekiti State lost her to the cold hands of death on 6th April, 2013 after a protracted battle with cancer. Thereafter, Prof (Mrs) Modupe Adelabu, the Chairman of Ekiti State Universal Basic Education Board was appointed as the Deputy Governor and sworn in on Wednesday, 8th May, 2013 (Afisunlu, 2013).

Table 5: 2007 Elections into State House of Assembly: Distribution of Contestants on Gender Basis

No of seats	No of Contestants	No of Female Contestants	No of Male Contestants	% of Female Contestants	% of Male Contestants	No of female elected
26	128	8	120	6.25	93.75	-

Source: INEC, Ado-Ekiti

Table 6: 2007 Senatorial Elections: Distribution of Contestants on Gender Basis

No of all Contestants	No of Male Contestants	No of Female Contestants	% Female Contestants	% of Male Contestants	No of Female elected
25	24	1	4	96	-

Source: INEC, Ado-Ekiti

Table 7: 2007 House of Representatives Election: Distribution of Contestants on Gender Basis

No of seats	No of contestants	No of Male Contestants	No of Female Contestants	% of Female Contestants	% of Male Contestants	No of Female elected
6	39	33	6	15.4	84.6	3

Source: INEC, Ado-Ekiti

In Table 5, it is shown that there were 8 female contestants (6.25%) out of the total contestants (128) who contested for the 26 seats into the State House of Assembly and none of the female contestants got elected. Though the percentage of female contestants into House of Assembly rose from 3.4% in 2003 to 6.25% in 2007, there was no female elected into the House of Assembly. For the 2007 Senatorial elections, there was only one female contestant (4%) out of the total contestants (25) for the three seats in the Senate and the lone female contestant never got elected as indicated in Table 6. From Table 7, it is seen that the only three successful female candidates in the 2007 general elections in Ekiti State were those elected into the House of Representatives. Out of the six seats that were contested for, women were able to get three seats even though the percentage of female contestants (15.4%) was very low to that of men which was 84.6%.

Furthermore, in the last general elections in 2011, for the Senatorial elections in the state, there were four female contestants (16.7%) while the percentage of male contestants was 83.3%. None of the female contestants got elected as shown in Table 8 below:

Table 8: 2011 Senatorial Elections: Distribution of Contestants on Gender Basis

No of Seats	No of Contestants	No of Female Contestants	No of Male Contestants	% of Female Contestants	% of Male Contestants	No of Female Elected
3	24	4	20	16.7	83.3	Nil

Source: INEC, Ado-Ekiti

Table 9: 2011 House of Representatives Elections: Distribution on Gender Basis

No of Seats	No of Contestants	No of Female Contestants	No of Male Contestants	% of Female Contestants	% of Male Contestants	No of Female Elected
6	41	4	37	9.75	90.25	Nil

Source: INEC, Ado-Ekiti

Also, Table 9 indicates the elections into the House of Representatives where there were four female contestants (9.75%) and 37 male contestants (90.25%) that contested for the six seats. The former three female representatives that were elected in 2007 who re-contested did not get elected. All the seats were taken over by their male counterparts.

Table 10: 2011 House of Assembly Elections: Distribution on Gender Basis

No of Seats	No of Contestants	No of Female Contestants	No of Male Contestants	% of Female Contestants	% of Male Contestants	No of Female Elected
26	189	45	144	23.8	76.2	4

Source: INEC, Ado-Ekiti

From Table 10, in the 2011 House of Assembly elections, we have appreciable number of women (45) who came out to slug it out with their male counterparts (144) and four women got elected into the State House of Assembly. Even though, the percentage of the female representatives which is 15% of the no of seats (26) is low, but this was the first time that the House of Assembly has four female members which showed that women are coming out of their shell to participate in electoral politics. This is still likely to increase in future but the fact still remains that the degree of improvement remains marginal and it is still far below the 1995 Beijing Declaration on which provides that 35% of all positions in government be given to women.

1.5 Factors Militating Against Active Women Participation in the Electoral Politics

A number of obstacles are on the path of women who intend to play active part in the electoral process of Nigeria. Some of these obstacles are simply as a result of their natural status as women – the belief that nature has consigned them to a specific role in the society. The other obstacles are man-made- a strategic ploy by their male counterparts to ease them out of the way. Some of these obstacles are discussed herein.

The inability of women to occupy party executive positions, (although, the position of women leader is reserved for them) has been seen as a major barrier to women participation in politics. There is large scale discrimination from the men folk, both in voting for candidates and in allocating political offices. More often than not, men constitute a larger percentage of the party membership and this tends to affect women when it comes to selecting or electing candidates for party executive positions and elections. Since men are usually in 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. Women usually constitute a smaller percentage of political party membership because of the social, cultural and religious attitudes of different Nigerian societies which most often tend to relegate women to the background. As a result, only very few men, even among the educated, allow their wives to come out and participate in the electoral process especially as “card carrying” members of political parties.

There is also the upbringing and orientation of women in Nigeria. Due to no fault of theirs, women see most things as the exclusive preserve of men. A good example is the realm of politics – women think that only men should engage in politics, that is why despite their numerical strength, they hardly influence the politics of the country. It is not surprising that we always hear of women contesting positions of deputy/vice in local or community based organization and in mainstream politics, also for vice – president, deputy governor, or party treasurer leaving the men to aspire to the number one position. This poor mindset was imposed and is still being imposed by societal values and cultural mores where women are brought up to see themselves as inferior to their male counterparts.

Also, the feminine gender in its nature does not have the courage to face the hazardous political situation as demonstrated by violence, thuggery and intimidation. Naturally, women are more soft – minded than men and may not introduce violence and thuggery in their politicking. Conversely, men deploy all arsenals within their reach to ensure success at the polls. Some women who would have given society good leadership but who are not strong enough to absorb the devastating effects of thuggery and political violence against them are scared away from competitive politics. Thus, it becomes generally difficult for women to swim the murky waters of Nigerian politics. They (especially those of them that are married) cannot attend midnight caucus meetings of the political parties where most often, crucial decisions are taken and offices that are supposed to be thrown open for contest are shared. We are all aware that such unholy hours are not suitable for women who have children to take care of, and whose husbands are not politically inclined or the immediate family is not supportive. Our male politicians exploit this singular situation to scheme out the women from active participation and relegate them to “clapping and singing” politicians.

Moreover, lack of adequate finance is a crucial hindrance to effective women participation in politics in Nigeria. A large number of the Nigerian women population is not as financially strong as their male counterparts because most women do not have access to credit schemes and facilities like men. To be a successful politician in Nigeria, one must have money to spend because Nigerian politics is a capital-intensive venture, as meetings, publicity, campaign strategies, have to be financed. Again women politicians are often rejected and condemned by their fellow women. This may be because women politicians or women who hold top government appointment over the years have not been able to distinguish themselves from the crass for materialism, corruption, lack of accountability that characterize Nigeria politics. Also the view that Nigerian politics is a "dirty game" influences the grassroots women to see those who venture into politics as dirty, wayward and even cultural deviants because of the patriarchal nature of our society and women are expected to subordinate themselves to the control of men.

More so, family responsibilities and child bearing / childrearing hinder women from participating in electoral politics. The roles of women as wives, mothers and housekeepers are to be performed on a full-time basis, while any other career is regarded as secondary. Thus, much of the time they might have wished to devote to politics is taken up by their maternal challenges and obligations.

Recommendations

To overcome these and several other obstacles militating against women's participation in politics, women must be proactive; they must register and obtain their voters' cards. They should also register with the political party of their choice in their various wards; attend ward meetings regularly and participate in all activities including campaign rallies, lectures, etc. Women should not allow men to discourage or discredit them; however, those that are married should carry their spouses along in deciding to go into active politics. By so doing, they will be physically strengthened and morally empowered.

Women in active politics should be charismatic, hardworking and carry their personality with a considerable degree of dignity to gain the support of their fellow women. This is also important because men respect women of high moral standard. No man respects any female politician who is willing to engage in immoral acts with a so-called male political godfather or benefactor.

Also, women should encourage and support fellow women who are contesting elective positions. Fundraising dinners can be organized to raise money for female candidates and obstacles to credit schemes and facilities should be reviewed as they affect women. Moreover, concessions should be given to women to encourage them to take up elective offices so that they can be part of the governance process. The UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other international treaties to which Nigeria is a signatory have taken this position.

More so, the social status of women should be improved (human right, equality of rights) in the realm of law and institutions. Thus, women in parliament and government should promote women into the mainstream of big businesses so that they can influence the economy of our country and thereby improve their status which will invariably enhance their participation in the political process of the country. The wave of violence, thuggery, insecurity that characterized our politics should be arrested so that decent women and men can participate in it.

Finally, there must be a change in the socio-cultural obstacles and prejudice that readily put girls and women in a position of subservience and limitation thereby making it difficult for them to realize their fullest potentials and abilities.

II. Conclusion

From the foregoing, we have been able to discuss women participation in the electoral process in Nigeria using Ekiti State as our case study. We found out that the number of women that participate in politics is still very low compared to that of men as shown in the 2003, 2007 and 2011 general elections in Ekiti State. In spite of the 1995 Beijing Declaration, to which Nigeria is a signatory and which provides that 35% of all positions in government and government owned concerns be given to women, Nigerian women are yet to reap the benefits of the declaration. The paper also enumerated some of the factors militating against women participation in politics and made recommendations as to overcoming the obstacles.

In conclusion therefore, there is still a continuing trend of male dominance in politics. This is a pointer to the fact that a lot still has to be done to address the political problems confronting women in a rapidly changing developing society. The increasing awareness by the society at large warrants that women should get more involved making conscious efforts to sensitize fellow women on the need for them to organize and coordinate their activities towards improving their positions in the society.

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