Women and Political Office Holding In Cross River State of Nigeria: A Study of Cultural Barriers

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Abstract

This study investigates whether cultural factors play a significant role in the low number of women in political positions in Cross River State of Nigeria. Stratified random sampling was used in this study for the purpose of separating the respondents into educated (HND/B.Sc. and above) and less educated. Responses from educated respondents were used in this study. Equal number of questionnaire was distributed to male and female respondents in each senatorial district. Data were collected by distributing 1223 questionnaire across the three senatorial districts of the state (407 the northern senatorial district, 408 in each of the south and central senatorial districts). Likert-scale ranking (of 4, 3, 2, 1) was used in the questionnaire to measure the respondents views on how certain cultural views affect the number of women in political office holding duties. T-test statistical technique was used to analyze data obtained. It was found that culturally, women are deemed to be inappropriate for such duties, which account for their very low number in political office-holding duties considering their number in the population of Nigeria (about half of the population).
Keywords: Public Policy, Cultural barriers, Women leadership

1. Introduction

The development of a nation and establishment of a just, equitable and prosperous society depends, to a large extent, on the full and active participation of women in the political deliberations and key economic activities of that nation, beyond the window-dressing of featuring them in the fanfares at political rallies and similar events. It is, therefore, arguable that addressing the issues surrounding women's non-inclusion in public life is key to the emergence of participatory and economically sustainable society (Duke, 2010).

Even though it has been argued that women have generally transited from dependence on their husbands to dependence on the state and this shift has largely improved their position and given them new resources for mobilization, protest, and political influence, evidence of their subordination still remains (Waylen, 1998). In Africa, women's absence or non-visibility in decision-making processes and access to power are critical issues that have long been ignored. This situation accounts for the trivialization, if not total disregard, of the concerns of women particularly in this region, where women continue to remain oppressed and struggle over virtually everything; from basic survival to resource ownership. The problem, in this regard, is especially acute in those countries of Sub-Saharan Africa in which the existing structures of society serve to perpetuate cultural practices that ensure the subjugation and marginalization of women in virtually all spheres of life.

The dilemma for women today, however, is that despite the liberal provisions of the Constitutions and laws of various countries, serious inequalities remain. Indeed, right from the days of the freedom struggle, women have been consistently discouraged to take part in active politics. For this reason, their actual participation remains relatively low in spite of the fact that there has been remarkable increase in the level of literacy and political awareness among them.

For instance, the Beijing Women Conference of 1995 (Beijing Platform of Action), resolved that thirty percent of all elective offices be reserved for women, especially parliamentary ones. Records from 28 of the 39 parliamentary elections conducted in 2005 showed that good progress has been made in terms of meeting this 30 percent benchmark. Norway recorded 37.9 percent women share in all of its elected officers. Denmark, Sweden, and Germany equally exceeded the 30 percent benchmark in the same period. In Africa, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Republic of Tanzania are the only leading lights as they had each achieved the 30 percent level by 2005. The story in other parts of Africa is pathetic. In Latin America, noteworthy progress has been made as well. A case in point is Honduras, where an 18 percent increase was registered, bringing the total to a record level of 23 percent of women participation. Similar progress was reported in Venezuela at a 17.4 percent increase. Similarly, both Argentina and Bolivia had since implemented electoral quota to promote women candidacies in their parliaments (Udogu, 2007).

Lack of fair representation of women in political offices in Cross River State is a problem which this study seeks to examine. The level of political participation of women in the political process continues to be adversely affected by a myriad of environmental factors despite the fact that there have been marked improvements in the general rate of literacy and

political awareness among women. The customary and traditional laws, for instance, have always given more power and control over resources and decision-making processes to the men, hence making most systems largely undemocratic. This partly explains why women's socioeconomic and political growth remains stunted. The dilemma for women, today, is that despite the liberal provisions of national Constitutions and various state policies, deep structural inequalities still remain in most societies. Further compounding this problem is the recent heightened level of violence and general criminalization of politics in African countries.

Regardless of the recent progress made by women in such areas as education, the professions, and employment, the female folk still remain largely excluded from the mainstream of political, economic, and social life of most societies in the sub-Saharan region (Duke, 2010). This situation presents a paradox because of its implications for the female population, in particular, and society, as a whole. In Nigeria, for instance, women make up almost half of the total population at 48.78 percent (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2007). Sidelining, in any way whatsoever, such a substantial portion of the population has far-reaching implications for the systemic development of the nation, and more particularly its ability to meet the targets of some important globally subscribed human development such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, as suggested, women's lives, education, and their entry into the professions might break the historic cycle of violence and domination (Gilligan, 1993).

1.1. Objective

To ascertain whether cultural beliefs and practices significantly influence and determine the number of women holding political offices in Cross River State of Nigeria.

1.2. Statement of Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between cultural beliefs and practices and political office holding by women

2. Literature Review

The cultural factor (barrier) forms one of the most important impediments to the participation of women in most facets of public life (Duke, 2010). African traditions have mainly defined and ascribed separate roles to males and females. While the male roles are more empowering, the female roles are disempowering. These gender roles and societal expectations hinder the participation of women in politics. Non-conformists are made to suffer the negative effects.

In Nigeria, for instance, the culture and traditions of most communities actually violate women's rights and impede gender equality. Women are regarded as the weaker sex; they are not supposed to own properties; only get to speak when spoken to by men; and, remain relevant essentially in the kitchen and bedroom. Further compounding this circumstance is the demand on the women as wives, mothers, and home keepers, leaving them with little time and energy to partake in political meetings and campaigns, which unfortunately take place at very odd hours and with no strict compliance to time. This unfriendly time schedule excludes

women who often have other domestic issues to cope with (Duke, 2010; Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974: 20-22. Anifowoshe, 2004). More than men, women suffer an acute lack of access to capital for business and other purposes. With limited access to land or total denial of land-ownership rights, it remains a daunting task for most women to engage in sustainable economic activities of any commercial significance. Their dependence on family networks for financial support further drives down the instrument of subjugation among them. Women's unequal access to, and control of, resources is therefore an important problem and is at the heart of the causes of their low level of their political participation.
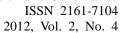
In spite of the fact that 20 percent of parliamentarians worldwide elected in 2005 were women, the picture in the African Region is still largely dismal (Udogu, 2007; Negash, 2006; Ehanire-Danjuma, 2005; Agbalajobi, 2010). In Nigeria, for instance, female membership in all political parties in 1999 was just five percent. Between 1999 and 2003, only 12 seats out of 990 in State House of Assembly (regional parliamentary) were occupied by women. Of the 774 local government (mayoral) chairs available during the same period, only nine were held by women. Similarly, a dismal 17.8 percent of the municipal Councillorship positions were held by women.

Between 2003 and 2007, women made up only 3.67 percent of the population of the Senators in the National Assembly (parliament). At the lower house of the national parliament (the House of Representatives), women constituted only 6.39 percent (Oha, 2007). In that country's 2007 elections, out of a total 7,160 candidates that contested in the April elections, only 628 women participated. Specifically, of the twenty-five candidates that contested for the office of the President, only one was a female. Similarly, only five women contested for the office of the Vice President. A total of 474 candidates contested for the gubernatorial elections in the thirty-six states of the federation. Out of this figure, only 14, or three percent, were women. Twenty-one female candidates contested for the office of Deputy Governor. While 799 contested for the senate, only 59 women, or 7.4 percent of the population, participated. Of the 2,342 that contested for seats in the House of Representatives, only 150, or 6.4 percent, were women. Out of the 5,647 persons that contested for the State House of Assemblies, only 358, or 6.3 percent, were women.

Currently, there are only nine female senators out of 109 Senators, translating to an unimpressive 8.2 percent. At the lower parliamentarian section, the House of Representatives has only 27 women, constituting 7.8 percent of the 360 members. In total, there are only five female Deputy Governors in Nigeria, from Imo, Lagos, Ogun, Osun, and Plateau States (Udogu, 2007).

The above statistics speak volumes about the level of women's active involvement or lack of it in the politics and general development of a typical West African country like Nigeria. Although the statistics above captures only elective positions, the story is the same or even worse in executive appointments in government and business. It would appear that women are invited only to complete the numbers in the local political arrangements.

According to Okwilagwe (2011), people's culture can be explained as the existing or prevailing patterns of values, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, activities, norms,

interactions and sentiments that are commonly held and shared through the communication process as developed and operated by members of the organization. Therefore, group culture is the pattern of automatic assumptions, unconsciously held, operated and taken for granted by the members of the group. The necessary and major points of emphasis are that: the cultural backgrounds of the group are quite fundamental and encompassing; the group culture is naturally and often borne out of the value system which the members operate. By and large, the group culture determines the group climate which in turn influences management style and effectiveness. The cultural backgrounds of a member have enormous implications for group processes such as cooperation, communication, subscription or non-subscription to centrally held organizational value system and the decision-making process; and the attitudes and beliefs of members influence their acceptance and commitment to organizational goals.

3. Theoretical Framework

The conflict theory is used for the purpose of this study. The Conflict Theory draws mainly from the works of Karl Marx in the 19th Century, which sought to explain the basis of social conflict in societies (Wikipedia, 2010a). Marx's theory suggests that the most definitive element of all social relations among people in the society is economic in nature. According to him, human beings are basically driven by a need to satisfy their livelihood requirements, which in turn compels them to work in order to earn some income. It is in this process of securing an income that they necessarily come under economic arrangements that typically deliver the levers of power and control to the owners of capital and other critical resources used in production. Therefore, the dynamics of the resulting relationship is what defines the structure of society rather than a deliberate effort by a particular class to dominate the other.

As the owners of production capital naturally seek to ensure the maintenance and protection of their interests, so do conflicts arise between them and the economically weaker sections/classes of that society or group. These conflicts eventually lead to deep resentment, revolts, and, ultimately, revolution. While the effects of such revolution may be disruptive in the short-term, the long-run results are often arguably progressive for society. It is the disruptions occasioned by revolution that have informed the transition of society from a feudalistic to capitalist and then socialist one. It is still these disruptions that have partly informed the emergence of what can conveniently be termed here in this paper as a socio-capitalist economy in contemporary times, which is best represented by a mix of both socialist and capitalist principles of economics in macroeconomic management of states – a trend that has recently manifested across United States of America and European Union states in the management of the financial crisis in the state economy and its institutions.

To maintain continued dominance of society, the owners of capital necessarily employ the instruments of oppression. These instruments are typically represented by the obvious and subtle control and use of government, police and religious institutions. Added to this is the continued use of land as a tool of marginalization in African societies. Arising from this dominance is the insinuation and support of the superiority of the controlling class (male) in virtually all facets of social life.

In the context of male-female relationship in African societies, the denial of access to land

and other resources, tight control of organizational hierarchy, unfavorable economic and social contracts, income disparities or wage gaps, access to education, and a stifling domestic regime for women all result in the emergence of a conflict situation and continual struggle for equality that is both energy-dissipating and wasteful for the society at large. As suggested by Marx, societies that are founded on exploitative economic arrangements, generated within themselves, are bound to self-destruct (Wikipedia, 2010a).

4. Methodology

4.1. Study Area

This study focuses on Cross River State of Nigeria. Cross River State is in South-South political region of Nigeria. Cross River State is a coastal state in South Eastern Nigeria, named after the Cross River, which passes through the state. Located in the Niger Delta, Cross River State occupies 20,156 square kilometers. It shares boundaries with Benue State to the north, Ebonyi and Abia States to the west, to the east by Cameroon Republic and to the south by Akwa-Ibom and the Atlantic Ocean. Cross River has 3 senatorial districts (Southern, Central and Northern) which were all covered for the purpose of obtaining data for this study.

4.2. Data Source

Primary data is used for the purpose of this research. Primary data is obtained by the use of questionnaire instrument. 1223 questionnaires were distributed (and retrieved) to cover the three senatorial districts of the state (i.e. 407 in northern senatorial district, 408 in each of south and central senatorial districts). Respondents were carefully selected to reflect unbiasedness (equal number of male and female respondents in each senatorial district). Educated persons who can relate with the subject matter (i.e. people with HND/B.Sc. and above) were used as respondents from whom data were gotten. Likert scale ranking (1-4) was used for the purpose of this research.

4.3. Sample size

Sample size of 1223 was used in this research. This size was adopted to make the sample representative (i.e. 407 in northern senatorial district, 408 in each of south and central senatorial districts).

4.4. Sampling Technique:

Stratified random sampling is used for the purpose of this study. Possible respondents are divided into 2 strata: 1. Educated, and 2. Less educated. The educated stratum (which represents people with HND/B.Sc. and above) was used for this study. Among educated folks, random sampling was used to obtain respondents.

4.5. Analytical Technique:

Frequency distribution, Descriptive statistics and T-Test (one-sample) are used for the purpose of this study. On a scale of 1-4, where 4 represent Strongly agree, 3 Agree, 2 Disagree, and 1 Strongly Disagree in that order for cultural beliefs that discriminate against women in political office-holding duties.

5. Result

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Responses on Cultural factor that discriminate against Women

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	122	10.0	10.0	10.0
	3	556	45.5	45.5	55.4
	4	545	44.6	44.6	100.0
	Total	1223	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Responses on Cultural factor that discriminate against Women

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
cultural factor	1223	2	4	3.35	.653
Valid N (listwise)	1223				

Table 3: One-sample t-Test for Cultural Factor Affecting Women and Political Office Holding

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	95.00% Confidence Bound	t	df	p-Value
CULTURAL_FACTOR	1,223.000	3.420	0.653	3.315	72.104	1,222.000	0.000

H_0: There is no significant relationship between cultural beliefs and practices and political office holding by women (Mean = 2.00) vs. H_a: There is a significant relationship between cultural beliefs and practices and political office holding by women (Mean > 2.00).

Test Statistic $T = X - \mu/(s/\sqrt{n})$

Where X = observed mean

μ = population mean

s = standard deviation

n = number of observations

$= 3.420 - 2 / (0.653/34.971)$

$= 75.936$

6. Discussion

In Table 1, on a scale of 4,3,2,1 of Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree respectively of belief systems that discriminate against women, it is found that rank 4 representing Strongly agree occupies 44.6% totaling 545 of 1223 respondents, rank 3 representing Agree occupy 45.5% representing 556 respondents, rank 2 representing Disagree occupy 10% representing 122 respondents of 1223. This clearly shows a bias against women in the cultural beliefs of the people. This is an indication that a vast majority of respondents (90%) either "agree" or "strongly agree" with belief systems that discriminate against women.

Table 2 which shows Descriptive Statistics on Responses on Cultural factor that discriminate against Women records a Mean of 3.35 which tends towards strong agreement with discriminatory cultural beliefs against women.

Table 3 shows One-sample t-Test for Cultural Factor Affecting Women and Political Office Holding. Decision Rule is that when Test Statistic T is less than Tabulated Statistic t, accept H_0, and reject H_a, and when Test Statistic T is greater than tabulated statistic t, reject H_0, and accept H_a. In this case since the T (75.936) is greater than t (72.104), we reject H_0, and accept H_a which states that: Culturally, women are believed to be inappropriate for political office holding duties.

The findings of this study are in line with the position of Ehanire-Danjuma (2005) who found out that in all probability, women's role in political party mobilization during election campaign may far exceed that of men. But when it comes to top party decision-making and candidacy, male chauvinism prevails everywhere. Women are relegated to the various women's wings of the political parties where they are used as tools for mobilization of votes for the men while men control the political parties exclusively. At the end of the day, the women's leader is appointed to a position, not on her personal merit but as compensation for mobilizing votes and as a token representative of women. Meanwhile, the men continue to mobilize the plum positions of power and influence. The women wings are therefore instruments of political exploitation for the acquisition of power by the men.

In his study, Agbalajobi (2010) argued that Women Participation in Nigerian politics is an issue of great importance. Women have been put at the background politically for years; this

has engendered a consciousness of women under-representation in public life. This position proved to be in line with the findings of this study.

7. Conclusion and Recommendation

From the findings of this study, it is clear that though constitutionally and legally, women are equal to men, and should not be discriminated against in Nigeria, cultural beliefs still hold a large percentage of them from being able to occupy some positions or offices in the helms of affairs in the country. This is a source of potential conflict between the male and female gender both in the present and future, as it shows that the female gender don't have equal access to resources in the political arena. This situation is neither socially, economically or politically profitable, and certainly offers no room for sustainable national development, as well, it may be a fertile situation for conflict (revolt).

The implication of the findings of this study is that though constitutionally and legally, women are equal to men, and should not be discriminated against in Nigeria, more has to be done to educate the populace (both men and women) on these constitutional and legal rights which the women have to equally enjoy resources in the political arena. This education has be done and spread by all concerned in the political well-being of Nigeria as a country. These include the government and its information/orientation agencies, educational institutions at all levels (from primary to tertiary), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), etc. With these education and enlightenment campaigns, the women folk will be more aware of the rights they have and the roles they can play by virtue of these legal and constitutional rights on one hand, and on the other hand, the men folk will learn to be more accommodative and appreciative of the role(s) the women folk can play in the political arena.

In addition, the government should lead the way in finding out women who have succeeded and excelled in their chosen endeavors, and make them play more active and constructive roles in governance at all levels (local, state and federal). These would give them the platform to make contribution to societal and national development.

Finally, the women who have found themselves in political office holding duties today should prove themselves competent and capable. This will be a practical proof to society learn from.

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