

## WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN THE NIGERIAN 2015 GENERAL ELECTION

Joy. U. Egwu

Dr., Department of Political Science, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria

[Joy.ucha@gmail.com](mailto:Joy.ucha@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Participation and apathy are the twin issues in elections and politics all over the world. According to feminists and political participation theorists those who do not participate as voters are apathetic, which can be measured as a percentage of the total registered voters in a country, that cast their votes in a specific election. In this paper, we have presented and analyzed the percentage of those who participated in the 2015 Nigerian general elections across the board, and specially the percentage of women who participated as against those who were registered. Specifically, the paper analyzes the percentage of women who were elected to various offices of the country at the national and state levels using a comparative method which shall address the participation patterns from the past to the present elections of 2015, in Nigeria. The methodology adopted is based on secondary data which have been analysed using descriptive statistics expressed in term of tables. Results indicated interesting emerging patterns and trends in women political participation in Nigeria. The obvious implications of these for the future are indicated.

**Keywords:** Women, voters, voted and political participation in election.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Women constitute more than half of the world's population, Afolabi etal (2008). He also observed that they contribute in vital ways to societal development which include; mother and home manager; community organiser, producers, socio-cultural and political activists. However, throughout history, these contributions and achievements are silent and neglected creating the impression as if women are virtually invisible. In Nigeria as well, even with the women's higher population over men, their access to decision making is highly limited (Ekundayo,2004)

It is observed that Nigerian women over the years had operated in less than liberal democratic environments despite the constitutional provision that gave them equal rights into political participation in the country. Despite the constitutional provisions of 1999, section 40 and 42(1) and section 77(2) which prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, the political climate or space has not been favourable to women participation in politics as it creates a structure of inequality which denies them access to decision making in their country. This in effect affects women's perception of politics leading to a very low level of political representation of women.

This paper's aims are to analyse with statistics or data the political status of Nigerian women from pre-colonial period till date. The analysis includes why the Nigerian women are politically neglected, the challenges women have to face, and finally the way forward.

## **2. WOMEN AND NIGERIAN POLITICS FROM PRE-COLONIAL, COLONIAL AND POST COLONIAL PERIODS**

### **2.1 The Pre- Colonial Period**

Historically, the Nigerian women's participation in politics can be classified into three periods which are the Pre-colonial, Colonial and Post-colonial periods. In the pre-colonial period women were involved in politics. Examples of such great women are the Queen Amina of Zaria, Princess Moremi of Ife, Princess Inikpi of Igala, Iyalode Efunsetan Amwura of Ibadan and Emotan of Benin. These women were warriors and were able to save their communities from their enemies and the vagaries of war. Awe (1992:2) called them the "Saviour of their Societies". Because they seriously contributed to building of peaceful environments for the development and growth of their empires. For instance, according to Afolabi et al, (2013:38) in this period, they founded cities, led migrations and even conquered kingdoms. They also held powerful positions and were part of decision making in their societies such as Umu-ada of Ibo land and in Western Nigeria (Yoruba) the Iyalode, a title for the leader of women group who were members of the leadership that represented women as members of the Council of State till 1874; Afolabi et al (2013: 40). This was a period when women were seen as an instrument of social cohesion and mobilisation as they fully participated in the governance of their societies that led to the growth and development of their cities. Finally, Afolabi et al (2013) noted that the role of women in this period of political organization may be defined in terms of involvement, direct or indirect, in the activities of government.

### **2.2 Colonial Period**

During the colonial period of 1860 - 1960 in Nigeria, the great achievements by some Nigerian Women in the pre-colonial era became dwindled especially since the amalgamation of 1914. The non-involvement of women in the politics of contemporary Nigeria has its root in the colonial period. This period excluded women and disempowered them, thereby overturning a feat which women had already gained during the pre-colonial period. Consequently, these women witnessed disempowerment, deprivation, seclusion and marginalisation in the colonial period.

The political administration of most Nigerian communities was dominated by men. The colonialist, (the British) made use of male traditional rulers as Sole Native Authorities. Mba (1997) says that women felt victimised and deprived. This in effect led to the basis of women's political actions which resulted to various protest movements such as Aba Women's Riot of 1929, (Ikpe 1997:257). There were constant protests against colonial policies which were unfavourable to the women's wellbeing. For instance, from 1918 till the end of the colonial rule in 1960, there were protests against different colonial ordinances like the Native Revenue Ordinance.

In this period, women also formed modern pressure groups and political parties, for example, the Lagos Women's League for better sanitary condition and women education, Women's Party in 1944 which agitated for women's welfare and the equality of Sexes. Others were Abeokuta Ladies Club which metamorphosed into Abeokuta Women's Union in 1946. In 1949, its scope was extended and its name was changed to the Nigerian Women's Union, (Mba 1982:25-26).

However, few women who could distinguish themselves in this period, contested for elective offices. Such women were Margaret Ekpo. She won the election on her own merit into the Eastern House of Assembly in 1953/1954 and attended constitutional conferences. Other women included Lady Aboyomi, Mrs Kutu, Miss Young and Mrs Femi Pearse; Mba (1982: 134-155). These women organisations helped to push women's welfare matters in an organised manner, to the attention of the colonial government and the public. Against the colonial policy, these women established political parties which dominated the Nigerian politics from 1951 to independence in 1960; Ikpe (1993:259). In addition, these parties helped to mobilize grass root women for their parties. In the Northern Nigeria also, Hajia Gambo Sawaba contributed immensely by rallying women for voting purposes. These women throughout became women voter catchers for their parties.

### **2.3 Post Colonial Period**

After independence in 1960, women participation in politics reduced with the effect of the emergent acrimonious party politics of the post-colonial era which was characterised by the bitter rivalries of the ethnic -based and paternalistic political party organizations. Violent politics became detrimental to women's participation, since violent ethnic politics succeeded in splitting the women into opposing camps which latter made unified National mass action became impossible, (Ikpe 1997:262).

However, some women still played important roles in the women's wing of the major political parties and few won elections to different Houses. Such women included Mrs. Bernice Kerry and Wuarola Esan who won seats in the Federal Parliament while Mrs Margaret Ekpo and Mrs Janet Muokelu won in the Eastern Nigerian House of Assembly. Mba (1982: 189) noted that there was no woman Minister at the Federal Level during this period.

Nigerian Second Republic was (1979-1983), was ushered in after sixteen years of military intervention, when Nigeria returned to democracy under the leadership of President Alhaji Shehu Shagari. Many women were involved in the politics of the day as they were also members of some political parties such as National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). Out of 475 candidates which contested for Senate Seats, only 4 candidates were women and they all lost the election. Only two women succeeded to win seats into the Federal House of Representative and five women were successful in the existing States Houses of Assembly, (Mba 1982:303). Some of the women that won these seats were Mrs J. C. Eze, Mrs V. O. Nnaji and Mrs A. Babatope.

### 3. WOMEN AND NIGERIAN POLITICS FROM 1999-2014

In the democratic dispensation of 1999, concerted efforts were made by women groups, women advocates and activists, civil society organisations, the Nigerian government and international agencies and donor communities to increase women participation in politics and decision making but to no avail. Three political parties were registered in the country but none was registered by women. Instead, statistics revealed very low, disproportionate representation of women in political participation. The situation fell below the recommendation of 30% by the Beijing Affirmative Platform for Action in 1995 and 35% recommendation of National Policy on Women adopted in July 2000.

Okolie (2004) defines political participation as "freedom of expression, association, right to free flow of communication, right to influence decision process and right to social justice, health services, better working conditions and opportunity to franchise". Agbalajobi (2010) noted various variables of political participation which include voting in election and contesting elective (public) offices but argued that these do not mean representation in decision making and governance. He further buttressed that women's increase in political participation is measured by such factors as :

- The number of women who vote in the elections.
- The number of public offices held by women.
- The number of women related policies implemented by the government.

The 1999 general election registered 47M voters in the country. Out of the total voters registered, 27m (50%) of the total were women (INEC 2001). In the same period, a total number of 11,117 electable positions were available but only 631 (5.6%) were contested by women of which 180 positions were won by women . Then out of this 180 (1.6%), 140 positions were women elected at Ward Levels as Ward Councillors (INEC 2001). It is interesting to note that from 1999 to 2003, women only occupied 1.6% of the elected positions (Ome 2014). Till date men dominate most public offices. The general elections held in the country in 1999, 2003 and 2007 saw only few women elected into various offices. Several women contested both the gubernatorial and presidential elections but none has ever won.

#### 3.1 House of Assembly

In 1999, out of 978 contestable seats in the 36 Houses of Assembly, men occupied 966 leaving only 12 seats for women, a percentage of 1.2%. An improvement came in 2003 with women having 39 seats out of 951 seats representing 4%. In year 2007, women occupied 54 seats out of a total of 990 with a percentage of 5.5%. See table below:

Table I

Year	Total no. of Seats.	Men/ Percentage	Women/ Percentage
1999	978	966 (98.8%)	12(1.2%)
2003	951	912 (96%)	39 (4%)
2007	990	936 (94.5%)	54 (5.5%)
2011	990	978 (98.79%)	12 (1.21%)

Source: Database of INEC 2007 and 2011

### 3.2 House of Representatives

In the House of Representatives, in 1999, out of a total 360 seats, women won 13 representing 3.6%. In 2003, men occupied 318 out of 339 leaving women with only 21 seats, a percentage of 3.6%. The number increased in 2007 as women occupied a total of 25 seats, a percentage of 7%. In 2011 there was a significant drop in the number of successful women candidates into the House of Representatives. Out of 360 available seats, women won only 19 (5.27%). See table below:

Table II

Year	Total no. of Seats.	Men/ Percentage	Women/ Percentage
1999	360	347 (96.4%)	13 (3.6%)
2003	339	318 (94%)	21 (6%)
2007	358	333 (93%)	25 (7%)
2011	360	341 (94.72%)	19 (5.28%)

Source: Database of INEC 2007 and 2011

### 3.3 Senate

In the Senate of 1999, women occupied 3 seats out of total of 109 (2.8%). In 2003, the number of women increased to 4 (3.7%) as men occupied 105 out of 109 seats. In 2007 women occupied 9 out of 109 seats, a percentage of 8.3%. In the year 2011, out of the 109 senators who emerged winners at the polls, only 7 (6.4%) were women. See the table below:

Table III

Year	Total no. of Seats.	Men/ Percentage	Women/ Percentage
1999	109	106 (97.2%)	3 (2.8%)
2003	109	105 (96.3%)	4 (3.7%)
2007	109	100 (91.7%)	9 (8.3%)
2011	109	102 (93.6%)	7 (6.4%)

Source: Database of INEC 2007 and 2011

### 3.4 Deputy Governor

The table below shows further the discrimination, denial and disproportionate representation of women in political elective positions.

Table IV

Year	Total no. of Seats.	Men/ Percentage	Women/ Percentage
1999	36	36 (100%)	0 (0%)
2003	36	34 (94.45%)	2 (5.55%)
2007	36	30 (93.94%)	6 (16.6%)
2011	36	35 (99.91%)	1 (0.09%)

Sources: Database of the Independent National Electoral Commission 2007 and 2011

These figures for 2003–2007 are indications of gradual improvement but a poor representation of about 75 million women in the country. More worrisome is the drop in the number of successful female candidates in 2011 elections. Also figures from the database of the Independent National Electoral Commission cited by

Agbalajobi (2010) indicate that in 2003, in states like Adamawa, Cross River, Ebonyi, Jigawa, Kano, Kastina, Kebbi, Nassarawa, Oyo, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara, no woman was elected a member of House of Assembly. In states where they managed to secure election, they were very few indeed.

The 2011 general elections had an increase in the number of Nigerian women politicians. Significant numbers compared to the previous elections won the party primaries and they contested for elective positions in the various political parties. For example, the number who contested for National Assembly are 306 of which men candidates were 304 (90.9%) while women constitute 302 (9.1%) (Iraor,2001). Irrespective of how many women aspirants they were, only very few won the elective positions.

Furthermore, In 2011 general election, irrespective of discrimination and denial, two women came out as presidential aspirants of which one of them was dropped due to the issues she had with the Administration of Justice System (Eme 2014). But it was noted that the other woman by name Sarah Jibril continued as a presidential candidate (NCAA 2011) of which during the primary, she got only one vote. Also this period had four female vice presidential candidates; (Sun Editorial, 2011). If they had been voted into power, vice or deputies are regarded as spare tyres as they contribute little or nothing. Therefore women appointed as deputies have no say, they are still the silent minority.

There were 348 governorship candidates contesting elections across the Federation in 2011 but only 13 (3.7%) out of 348 aspirants were women and they contested in 10 states; yet none of these women was successful. Dame Virginia Etiaba who was a Deputy Governor to Governor Peter Obi, was sworn in as a brief Governor because of the challenges that Governor Peter Obi had in the court, (Eme 2014).

In Ebonyi State of Nigeria, the paper reveals that the total voters' registration in 2011 general elections was 876,249. Out of this number, 282088 were men voters while 584,166 were women's total registration (INEC website 2011). The State also has 13 Local Government Councils that make up the State. Since its creation in 1996 to 2015, only 3 women have been local Government Chairman (INEC website 2011). Although the Nigerian democracy since 1999 provided opportunity for women's participation in politics without providing the where with all, the situation was still better than the colonial period. Finally, unfortunately, the number and percentage of women who were successful at the polls in 2011 was less than the figure in 2007. Whereas, the 2007 figures were higher than the figures in the 2003 general elections; and the figures in 2003 were higher than the figures in the 1999 general elections. In 1999, the overall percentage of women was 2%; in 2003, it was 4% and in 2007 it was 6 % (Eme,et.al,2008).

#### **4. AN APPRAISAL OF 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

This section examines the extent to which women participated in politics in the 2015 general elections. The areas they participated in include voting, campaign, rallies, organising and contesting. The total number of registered voters was 68,833,476, where men had 22,944,984 registered and women had 45,888,984 registered (www.inec.2015). Even down to the State level for instance in Ebonyi State, its total voting registration was 1,074,273. Men had 358,091 and women 716,182 registered. With the above statistics, we argue that irrespective of the increased number of women registered, the country's politics is still largely dominated by men in elective offices. It also shows that Nigerian women participate only in rallies, campaigns, voters registration, voting and contesting. It shows also that women have numerical strength but their numbers are irrelevant in governance . Available statistics show that over 49% of the voters registration population are women yet only 7% (INEC 2011)are in governance. Consequently, women's huge contributions during politics are currently not translated into parliamentary seats. The 2015 general election still shows minimal women participation in elective positions though with enlarged numerical registrations. It is noted that out of 14 candidates that contested for the seat of the president, the only woman amongst them came out in the 12th positions.

As stated earlier men dominated the National Assembly, Gubernatorial, State Houses of Assembly, Local Government Chairmen and Wards in the past general elections. The 2015 elections did not present a vastly different picture in the number of women who are representing their constituencies for the next four (4) years. For instance, the Senate has 101 men elected into the House while women are 8 (INEC 2015). House of Representative has 346 men elected while 14 women are elected into the House (INEC 2015). Finally, since 1999 till 2015, in the 13 Local Governments of Ebonyi State, only 3 women have been chairmen or chairpersons (INEC website 2015). Below is a statistical representation of women participation in elective positions in 2015 across the Country, Nigeria;

STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY: Table V

Year	Total no. of Seats.	Men/ Percentage	Women/ Percentage
2015	990	930 (93.9%)	60 (6.1%)

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE: Table VI

Year	Total no. of Seats.	Men/ Percentage	Women/ Percentage
2015	360	346 (96.11%)	14 (3.89%)

SENATE: Table VII

Year	Total no. of Seats.	Men/ Percentage	Women/ Percentage
2015	109	101(92.66%)	8 (7.34%)

Source: INEC website 2015

## 5. THE CHALLENGES OF WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

From the foregoing, it is evident that Nigerian women have the lowest representation of 5.9% in the National Legislature when compared to most other African Countries and not to talk of the Highly Developed Countries (HDC). For example, Uganda has 34.6%, South Africa (43.2%), Ethiopia (27.7%) and Cameroon (20.1%) (Daily Times, May 18th, 2012). Also in the area of political representation in governance, Nigeria has paltry 7% women representatives, the lowest in the World (Vanguard Newspaper, Jan 21st, 2013). Their participation in elective positions has over the years not been encouraging. This creates a situation which narrows the women's chances of participating more in decision making positions. Women have proved their strength and competence even in the male dominated professions and shall prove their competence in elective positions if given a chance.

Although women have been playing crucial roles in politics in the country but they have not been adequately put in the decision making positions. Statistically, from 1999 to 2015, the number of women voters registered are always more than half of the total number of all registered voters but they record very poor performance in elective offices. This observation is largely, of course, due to the many sentimental attachments and misperceptions of the feminine gender. Many authors adduced the following as challenges affecting the women in elective positions such as cultural and religious factors, gender imbalance, lack of funds, and violent discrimination by the men folks, adequate education and time consuming domestic chores. However the present paper therefore presents the following as critical challenges and hindrances against women's elective positions in Nigeria;

- a) Lack of confidence on the part of women in Nigeria.
- b) Lack of superiority complex in women in Nigeria.
- c) Lack of trust amongst women/ Jealousy.
- d) Fear of success/ rejection amongst Nigerian women.
- e) Fear of popularity and shyness amongst Nigerian women.

**a) Confidence:** lack of confidence affects women participation in elective positions. They do not have self-assurance since in their early socialization; women were not trained to have confidence. Their mothers always lord it on them with such words as, "this is men's job", "you are not a man and stop behaving as such", "women are to be gentle and mild who can only engage in feminine type of work". The family and culture tend to determine and assign types of work suitable for women. Even in the University, girls are not seen to be confident enough to contest for Student's Union Government positions because from their

childhood, their minds have been biased that leadership is not for women but for those traditionally assigned the responsibility.

**b) Sense of Superiority complex:** Women regard themselves as very inferior to men. When some women were asked why they were not contesting in elective positions; one was very shy to answer the question, but she quickly replied "to do what in that place; that is not where I should be". Many women feel it is an abomination. Only few women replied in a sarcastic manner; "don't worry, we will get there". Women feel that they are 2nd class citizens and cannot boss their male leaders.

**c) Trust:** One of the challenges is trust whereby women are their worst enemies, though women hate to admit that they don't trust themselves. They believe that as long as women are in higher positions, there is a possibility of not helping their fellow women instead, they are usually harsh on them. Consequently, women prefer their men counterparts than fellow women in political positions.

Furthermore, jealousy is also a constraint where the concept of "pull her down" syndrome sets in as women condemn female aspirants by certain insinuations such as "who is she"? "She will brag for us", "Is her wardrobe richer than ours"? and "she will be greater than us". For example, Helen Gomwalk had a negative attitude towards Sarah Jibril's political ambition for the president in 1992 (News Watch, 1992: 10-13).

According to Helen Gomwalk;

*"If any woman has the ambition of the presidency,  
I would advise that she should not be in a hurry...  
If Sarah Jibril feels she is ready for the presidency,  
good for her"*

This assertion shows lack of support for fellow women, which may serve as discouragement to others. One may think that Sarah's bold move should be encouraged and supported by all women regardless of the timing and even the tribe. This lack of support from a fellow, high personality woman was a de-motivator for female aspiring politicians in Nigeria.

**d) Fear of Success:** Women are afraid of success because of the stereotypes attached to their success, such as prostitution, promiscuity and "bottom power". The culture does not think that women can make it to the top without sleeping with men. Consequently, the little respect she has is gone. For example, those who pioneered women in politics, such as Fumilayo Ransom Kuti and Margaret Ekpo in the 50's were regarded as stubborn and promiscuous women. Some women will like their brother to go on their behalf, irrespective of their qualification. Peradventure if they won, the women would worry about what the society will say or think about them, negatively.

Furthermore, women's fear of success affects both married and unmarried women. For married women, they feel that they will be greater than their husband's since in the Nigerian culture; women should not aspire to any positions greater than their husbands. Such husbands will always instigate certain negative words that will make the woman feel bad in case of any argument. Then those who are not married will have the fear of never getting married again. In order to get married they abstain from what will elevate them because men abhor successful women and they are rejected out rightly.

**e) Popularity:** Finally, popularity is another obstacle that hinders women's participation in elective positions. Do women like popularity? The answer is "NO". Not in the area of political elective positions. Some women interviewed acknowledged that they prefer their husbands to be more popular than themselves. They added that a woman should be a virtuous woman not a popular woman. A virtuous woman is supposed to stay back at home and take care of the home, organise and properly keep the husband's property and wealth. Therefore, let their husbands be popular, not themselves, they say.

## 6. THE WAY FORWARD/ RECOMMENDATIONS

The future of Nigerian women's participation in politics is quite bright. They are bright in the sense that from 1999-2015, more than half of the registered voters are women. What they need is to aspire more for elective positions, campaign seriously and win. There are already "Declarations and Conventions" from International Organisations, Governmental and Non-Governmental agencies aimed at removing all forms of political discrimination against women which support women politics such as;

- ❖ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- ❖ The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- ❖ The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the UN in 1979 (Agishi 2014:97).

The women should base their strong argument on the above Declarations and Conventions to push forward their case. With the formation of the Forum of Nigerian Women in Politics (FONWIP), Women's Right Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA); the Nigerian Council on Women Societies (NCWS), Women in Nigeria (WIN), the Federation of Muslim Women in Nigeria (FAMWAN) etc., women should use these organisations to form a rallying point for common action; politically, economically and socially and agitate for better conditions for women and for drawing attention to gender issues in politics as they affect women. These bodies/organisations should organize seminars, workshops, campaign advocacies to sensitize women, educate and erase promiscuous stigma, inferiority complex, fear of success and build confidence, in order to arouse the female participation in elective positions.

Those bodies mentioned above have the capacity, with the collaboration of the Ministry of Women Affairs, to take it upon themselves to sponsor women into elective positions and follow it up by sensitising women, rallying and campaigning, making sure that women vote for them since women have more voting capacity as they register more than 50% in all elections, so far conducted in Nigeria.

Finally, Gender Sensitive curriculum should be drawn up to be taught from primary schools to tertiary institutions to remove all traces of negative concept that pose challenges to women's participation in elective positions. By doing so, from childhood our primary schools will be socialized appropriately concerning women participation in politics.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In order to have more impact and encouragement for women participating in elective positions there should be a re-orientation of women, especially to rally or support their fellow women. Since women are more in number, constituting more than 50% of the world population which also reflects in voters registration, women should pull their population together and win in all the elective positions of their country if they seek to.

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