

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON THEIR PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS OF PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper conducted an empirical analysis of women's political empowerment and its impact on their participation in politics of Plateau State, Nigeria. Three research questions were formulated to guide the study. Cross-sectional mixed survey method was adopted in the study. The population of the study was made up of 219 respondents comprising 51 elected political party executives (both men and women), 5 women who have contested for electoral positions in Plateau State and 135 women leaders and 24 elected representatives in the Plateau State Assembly. The sample of the study was 170 respondents comprising of 44 elected party executives, 97 women leaders, 24 State Assembly members and 5 women who have contested for elections in Plateau State. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan table for determining sample size from a given population and was drawn using the stratified random sampling method. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire. The validity of the questionnaire was determined by one expert from Research, Measurement and Evaluation Unit of the Faculty of Education and two experts in Gender and Women Studies of the University of Jos. The reliability of the questionnaire was computed using Alpha Cronbach method. The reliability co-efficient of the questionnaire was 0.80. The data collected in the study was analysed using mean scores. The findings of the study revealed that women's political participation in Plateau State is low as there are very few women in elective and appointive positions. It was however discovered that women political empowerment through education, financial empowerment, legislation and policies can improve women political participation in Plateau State. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended among others that the Plateau State government through the Gender and Equal Opportunities Commission should make and implement a policy on inclusive equal gender leadership at the Local Government Councils that will empower women politically. This will ensure that every candidate for Chairmanship position chooses another gender as a running mate. This will empower women to participate in politics and contribute meaningfully to the development of the State.

KEY WORDS: Women, Female, Political Empowerment, Participation, Politics

INTRODUCTION

Women political representation in Nigeria, in particular, since the return to democracy in 1999 has been quite low and is estimated to be less than 10% both in elective and appointive positions (Awe, 2015). Plateau State is not an exception, with less than 5% representation in both elective and appointive positions (Kabir, 2020). In Nigeria and the Sub-Saharan Africa at large, what hinders women's political participation in the region has been largely attributed to patriarchy, low women education, low financial status and relegating women to domestic duties (Fadako, 2015). In many families today, many women as either daughters, sisters, mothers, widows, wives etc have become heads of families due

to some social and economic factors such as divorce, separation or loss of jobs, widowhood, violent conflicts, among others.

Furthermore, the issue of patriarchy dominates the African and Nigerian scenery where women are viewed as second class or inferior citizens and therefore their political participation roles are mainly relegated to voting and campaign activities. Despite Nigeria being a signatory to the 1995 Beijing Affirmative Action which clearly stipulates that women should be accorded at least 30% in decision-making positions, women political representation in Nigeria has never been up to 10% (Irabor, 2015). This evidence points to the fact that women may have been marginalized by men in the Nigerian political sphere. However, Nigeria has had a few of women politically appointed into the leadership positions who have served credibly. These women include but are not limited to late Professor Dora Akunyili who was the first Chairman of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration Control (NAFDAC), before she was elevated to a Federal Minister. Nigeria also has Dr. Ngozi Okonjo- Iweala who served twice as a Federal Minister of Finance and Coordinator of the Economy and is currently the Director-General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Again, Mrs. Amina Mohammed served as a Federal Minister of Environment and is currently a Deputy Secretary- General of the United Nations Organisation (UNO). Plateau State too has had two capable women who have been appointed and served as Federal Ministers in the persons of Dame Pauline Tallen, a former Deputy Governor and Dr. Sarah Reng Ocheke. Although they were not elected but appointed, policies and programmes under the leadership of these women were developed and implemented for the sustainable development of the entire country. One of such policies was the revision of the National Gender Policy of 2006 in 2022 by the then Minister of Women Affairs, Dame, Pauline Tallen. In the legislative arm of government, Plateau State has had few women elected into the State Assembly and House of Representatives like Rt. Hon. Joyce Rannap and Hon. Beni Lar who served for two terms and four terms respectively. Presently too, Plateau State has a female Deputy Governor and a former legislator, in the person of Ngo Josephine Piyo (Yakubu, 2020).

The revised National Gender Policy of 2022, is aimed at increasing the number of women in political office, party organs, and public life by setting a goal of 35 % Affirmative Action in favor of women. It is also aimed at promoting gender equality and inclusion in public life. However, it is clear that women in Nigeria are yet to benefit from these provisions as less than 10 % hold political offices. For example, the Senate in 2022 threw out a Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill which could have afforded Nigeria the opportunity to domesticate some of the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. The Bill was opposed by male senators (Goitom, 2022) and women could do nothing as the Nigerian parliament used a voice voting system. It might have been passed had there been gender parity in the Senate. Such male domination has significantly impeded the protection and promotion of women's representation and their contribution to national development.

Geisler (2015) asserts that women political marginalization may have its roots in the activities and nomination processes of the political parties. In most Nigerian political parties, the role of women is mainly relegated to that of vote canvassing. Women who aspire to contest for political positions are often denied party tickets due either to their poor financial strength or patriarchal nature of Nigerian political party structures, among others. It is an established fact that general elections are only contested by candidates presented by

registered political parties. Therefore, if women are denied victory at the primary elections, then their chances of getting into elective political offices would have been nullified already. Plateau State has had two female Deputy Governors, Dame Pauline Tallen (PDP, 2007-2011) and presently, Ngo Josephine Piyo (PDP, 2023 to date), both elected with their principals into the leadership of the State. Several institutional frameworks have however, been put in place to foster women's political participation and representation in Plateau State and Nigeria a whole. These frameworks include the 1999 Constitution, policies, international treaties, conventions and protocols, the National Gender Policy and the Gender and Equal Opportunities Commission, among others. However, despite the existence of these frameworks, women political participation still remains low. Given the low participation and representation of women in politics in Plateau State, this study was prompted to analyse the impact of women's political empowerment on their participation in politics in Plateau State, Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Since 1999, when Nigeria returned to democratic system of governance after a long military interregnum, there has been a low level of women participation in politics. Despite the various institutional frameworks put in place such as state laws and policies, international treaties, convention and protocols and the National Gender Policy, among others; women political participation in Nigeria and Plateau State in particular, has remained a mirage with political representation of women in government in the state still below 10% even after the 2023 elections. In Plateau State, like many other states in Nigeria, women political participation has been relegated to mainly voting and campaign activities. This is evident in the fact that only one woman was elected into the Plateau State 24-member Assembly in 2019 and two women in 2023. These two women have however been removed by the Appeal Court judgment of 2023, leaving the Plateau State Assembly without female representation and a voice on legislative matters. These figures have revealed gross under-representation of women in governance and hence the need to conduct this study to investigate women political empowerment and participation in politics in Plateau State. Furthermore, empirical evidence from the literature review (Irabor, 2015; Iloh & Ikenna, 2016) carried out by the researcher has revealed that there is paucity of literature on studies linking women political empowerment and political participation in Plateau State and hence the need for this study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the nature of women's political participation in Plateau State
2. What are the factors that militate against women's political empowerment and participation in politics in Plateau State?
3. What is the impact of women political empowerment on political participation in Plateau State?

METHODOLOGY

The cross-sectional survey method was adopted for the study. This research method was used to investigate the impact of women political empowerment on their participation in politics in Plateau State. The quantitative approach was adopted in the study.

The population for this study comprised of 219 respondents consisting of 51 elected political party executives (both men and women), 5 women who have contested for electoral

positions in Plateau State and 135 women leaders and 24 elected representatives in the Plateau State Assembly (NBS, 2023). The sample for this study was determined by using Krejcie and Morgan Table for sample size determination from a given population. To determine the sample size of elected party executive with a population of 51, the sample size is given as 44. To determine the sample size of women leaders with a population of 135 women, the sample size is given as 97. To determine the sample size of elected members at the State Assembly with a population of 24 members, the sample size is given as 24. To draw the sample of women who have contested for electoral positions, the population is the same as the sample. Therefore, 5 women were sampled. Therefore the total sample of the study comprised of 170 respondents. The researcher employed the stratified random sampling technique in drawing the sample for the study.

The study is based on primary data. The researcher used questionnaire as instrument for data collection. To validate the questionnaire used for the study, the instrument was given to one expert in Research, Measurement and Evaluation Unit of the Faculty of Education, University of Jos and two experts in Gender and Women Studies of the University of Jos to evaluate appropriateness of the instrument, clarity of expression and easy comprehension of information of the instruments while test –retest reliability was used to test the reliability of the questionnaire and a reliability coefficient of 0.8 was obtained. The data collected in the study was analysed using mean score. The criterion mean was established as 3.00. This implies that only mean of 3.00 and above were accepted and below 3.00 rejected.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the nature of women’s political participation in Plateau State?

Table1: Showing the responses on the nature of women’s political participation in Plateau State

S/N	Items	N	M	SD	Decision
1	Women political participation is high in Plateau State	170	1.99	0.911	Disagreed
2	There are many women in elective positions in Plateau State	170	2.03	0.917	Disagreed
3	There are many women in appointive positions in Plateau State	170	1.91	1.074	Disagreed
4	There are many women occupying key executive positions in political parties	170	1.16	1.008	Disagreed

Table 1 shows the responses to the research question on the nature of women’s political participation in Plateau State. The statement on whether women political participation is high in Plateau State was rated with a mean score of 1.99 and a standard deviation of 0.911 and was therefore disagreed with. The following statement on whether there are many women in elective positions in Plateau State was rated with a mean score of 2.03 and a standard deviation of 0.917. The next statement on whether there are many women in appointive positions in Plateau State was rated with a mean score of 1.91 and a standard deviation of 1.074 and was therefore disagreed with. The last statement on

whether there are many women occupying key executive positions in political parties was rated with a mean score of 1.16 and a standard deviation of 1.008 and was disagreed.

From the analysis of data collected, it was deduced that women's political participation in Plateau State is low as there are very few women in elective and appointive positions. There are also few women occupying key executive positions in political parties in Plateau State.

Research Question Two: What are the factors that militate against women's political empowerment and participation in politics in Plateau State?

Table 2: Showing factors that militate against women's political empowerment and participation in Plateau State

S/N	Items	N	M	SD	Decision
1	Low financial strength of women	170	4.36	1.119	Agreed
2	Poor girl-child/women education	170	4.37	1.098	Agreed
3	Patriarchy	170	4.1	0.974	Agreed
4	Lack of internal democracy of political parties	70	4.19	0.9	Agreed
5	Lack of support from fellow women	170	4.22	0.947	Agreed

Table 2 shows the responses of the respondents to the factors that militate against women's political empowerment and their participation in politics in Plateau State. The statement on whether low financial strength of women is a major factor that militates against women's political empowerment in Plateau State was rated with a mean score of 4.36 and a standard deviation of 1.119 and was therefore agreed with. The following statement on whether poor girl-child/women education is a major factor that militates against women's political empowerment in Plateau State was rated with a mean score of 4.37 and a standard deviation of 1.098 and was therefore agreed with. The next statement on whether patriarchy is one of the factors that militates against women's political empowerment in Plateau State was rated with a mean score of 4.8 and 0.974 and was agreed with. The following statement on whether lack of internal democracies of political parties is a factor militating against women's political empowerment in Plateau State was rated with a mean score of 4.19 and a standard deviation of 0.90 and was agreed with. The last statement on whether lack of support from fellow women as one of the factors that militate against women's political empowerment in Plateau State was rated with a mean score of 4.22 and a standard deviation of 0.947 and was therefore agreed with.

From the analysis on Table 2, it is evident that the factors that militate against women's political empowerment in Plateau State include low financial strength of women, poor girl-child/women education, patriarchy, lack of internal democracies of political parties and lack of support from fellow women.

Research Question Three: What is the impact of women political empowerment on political participation in Plateau State?

Table 3: Showing the Impact of Women political Empowerment on Political Participation in Plateau State

S/n	Item	N	M	SD	Decision
1.	Empowering women with financial resources can lead to active political participation	170	3.77	1.014	Agreed
2.	Empowering women with quality education can foster their political participation	170	4.08	0.827	Agreed
3.	Creating policies that foster equal opportunities for men and women in the political sphere can foster women's political participation	170	4.22	0.822	Agreed
4.	Promoting gender equality in all spheres of life can foster women political participation	170	4.28	0.728	Agreed

Table 3 shows that the statement on whether empowering women with financial resources can lead to active political participation was rated with a mean score of 3.77, a standard deviation of 1.014 and was therefore agreed with. The following statement on whether empowering women with quality education can foster their political participation was rated with a mean score of 4.08, a standard deviation of 0.827 and was therefore agreed with. The following statement on whether creating policies that foster equal opportunities for men and women in the political sphere can foster women's political participation was rated with a mean score of 4.22 and a standard deviation of 0.822 and was therefore agreed with. The last statement on whether promoting gender equality in all spheres of life can foster women political participation was rated with a mean score of 4.28 and a standard deviation of 0.728 and was therefore agreed with. From the analysis of data collected, it was deduced that empowering women with financial resources can lead to active political participation, empowering women with quality education can foster their political participation, creating policies that foster equal opportunities for men and women in the political sphere can promote women's political participation and gender equality in all spheres of life.

DISCUSSION

Research question one which investigated the nature of women's political participation in Plateau State is analysed as follows: From the analysis of data collected it was discovered that women's political participation in Plateau State is low as there are very few women in elective and appointive positions. There are also few women occupying key executive positions in political parties in Plateau State. Further investigation from the qualitative analysis revealed that the nature of women's political participation predominantly falls under the following roles; voters, canvassers of votes and women leaders of political parties. It was also discovered that women's political representation in elective and appointive positions in Plateau State is very poor. This finding is in tandem with the findings of Adebule (2018) who discovered that women's participation in politics in Nigeria is predominantly that of voters and not of representation.

Findings from the analysis of research question two, which investigated the factors militating against women's political empowerment and their participation in politics revealed that the factors responsible for poor women's political empowerment and participation in politics in Plateau State include but not limited to low financial strength of women, poor girl-child/women education, patriarchy, lack of internal democracy in political parties and lack of support from fellow women. Further investigation from the qualitative analysis also revealed same factors as being responsible for poor women's political empowerment in Plateau State. This finding is in conformity with the findings of Adedeji (2015) who discovered that patriarchy is the leading cause of poor women's empowerment in Nigeria. The finding is also corroborated by Adeleke (2012) who discovered that low financial capacity of women is a leading factor responsible for their poor empowerment to participate in politics in Nigeria.

Research question three which investigated the impact of women political empowerment and political participation in Plateau State was analysed and answered. The results from the analysis revealed that empowering women is a pre-requisite to their effective political participation. Empowering women with financial resources can lead to active political participation, empowering women with quality education can foster their political participation. Similarly, creating policies that ensures equal opportunities for men and women in the political sphere can foster women's political participation. Furthermore, additional findings from the qualitative analysis revealed that when women are given qualitative education right from the time when they are girls, it increases their prospects to participate in politics in future. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Afonja (2016) who discovered that women empowerment with education, financial resources and favourable policies can promote their participation in politics in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Since 1999, when Nigeria returned to a democratic system of governance after years of military dictatorship, there has been a low level of women participation in politics. Despite the various institutional frameworks put in place such as the 1999 Constitution (as amended), international treaties, conventions and protocols and the National Gender policies, among others, women political participation in Nigeria and Plateau State in particular have remained low with political representation of women in government in the state still below 10% even after the 2023 elections. In Plateau State, inspite of the establishment of the Gender and Equal Opportunities Commission of 2015, women political participation has not improved beyond voting and campaign activities. This is evident in the fact that only one woman was elected into the Plateau State 24-member Assembly in 2019 and two women in 2023 who have been removed by the Appeal Court Judgment of 2023. Even in the Local Government elections of 2024, only 12 female Councilors emerged out of 340. These figures revealed gross under-representation of women in governance and decision-making positions where laws, policies and key decision are made for the good governance of the State.

From the findings of this study, it is evident that women political empowerment and participation are very low in Plateau State largely due to the poor implementation and adherence to legal frameworks and policies formulated to foster women political empowerment for effective political participation. It is therefore concluded in this research that women political empowerment is a pre-requisite for their effective participation in politics. Hence the need to ensure that the frameworks and policies formulated to promote

women political empowerment are properly implemented and adhered to through executive and legislative actions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were proffered

1. The quest to foster women political participation should start with providing qualitative education to the girl-child. The gender disparity in education between male and female children should be closed by the government of Plateau State. Basic qualitative education should be provided for the girl-child and all barriers to such education such as early marriage, teenage pregnancy and cultural barriers should be eliminated.
2. The 30% Affirmative Action quota reservation for women in appointive and electoral positions as assented to at 1995 Beijing Conference by Nigeria and 35% by the National Gender Policy of 2022 should be included in the Nigeria Constitution and domestic and implementation in the Plateau State through the Gender and Equal Opportunities Commission.
3. The Nigerian government through the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should make it mandatory for political parties to also include and implement the 35% Affirmative Action in their party constitutions. This will impact on the structure and functions of the political parties across the states, including Plateau State.
4. That the Plateau State government through the Gender and Equal Opportunities Commission should make and implement a policy on inclusive Equal Gender Leadership at the Local Government Councils that will empower women politically. This will ensure that every candidate for Chairmanship position chooses another gender as a running mate. This will empower women to participate in politics and contribute meaningfully to the development of the State.

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