

Poor Economic Status Hinders Women's Participation in Political Elective Positions: A Case Study of Taraba South Senatorial District

Ishaya, J. and Emmanuel, J.
Department of Sociology,
Federal University Wukari.

Correspondence: ishaya4@fuwukari.edu.ng

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Abstract

Gender inequality in politics has been a debatable issue all over the world, in Africa and Nigeria in particular. The marginalization of women in elective positions by men in Nigeria poses a serious threat to the tenets of democracy. This paper aims to examine how poor economic status hinders women's participation in political elective positions using a case study of Taraba South senatorial district. The paper employed a mixed-method descriptive cross-sectional survey research design and applied liberal feminist theory to the study. The sample size was 384 out of 660,220 men and women of voting age. The respondents comprised electoral officers, party officials, and party members. A validated structured questionnaire and key informant interview (KII) were used for data collection. Results were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation, and thematic analysis of KII. The study's findings revealed that the inability of women to participate in elective positions in the Taraba South senatorial district is attributed to economic/financial power. The researchers recommend that certain elective positions be reserved exclusively for women.

Keywords: Gender, Gender Inequality, Politics, Political Participation, Elective Position.

Introduction

Gender inequality and low women's participation in elective position in politics has been a global phenomenon that is commonly found in every society be it in Europe, America, Asia, Australia etc. It is not peculiar to Africa or Nigeria in particular. Gender bias is as old as the history of mankind, and no ancient or modern civilization is exempted from this uneven treatment. In the US and other Western countries in 1890, women

did not have voting rights, and the nineteenth century saw the rise of women under the law. In 1893 New Zealand became the first country to extend the right to vote to women. Most countries followed suit in the first part of the twentieth century e.g. Denmark in 1915, the US in 1920 while other countries followed much later e.g. Liechtenstein in 1984; Kuwait in 2005 (Paxton et al., 2010).

Before the colonial rule in Nigeria,

women were noted to have played an active role in traditional political governance during the pre-colonial era (Akinboye, 2004; Ajayi, 2007). For instance, Daurama the queen of Daura, Amina of Zazzau in pre-Jihad, Iyayun the queen who ruled in the 15th century in Oyo, after the death of her husband, and Queen Kanbasa of Bonny were all recognized (Modupe, 2001; Kolawale et al., 2013). Nigeria's electoral epoch began during the colonial period which according to Udegbe (1998) was characterized by women disenfranchisement and massive erosion of their political power.

The involvement of women in the governance of Nigeria started with the milestone reaction of women in the Aba riot in 1929 against the activities of the colonialists in Nigeria's eastern region (Bakare, 2002). The riot was a culmination of the reaction to the appointment of warrant chiefs and subsequent other obnoxious policies of the imperialist government. The riot stands out in the history of women's democratic struggle in the country. Other recorded feats achieved by the women folks included those exercised by Mrs. Fumilayo Ransome-Kuti, whose opposition to colonial taxation of women in 1947 became known during the period, the activist role of Hajiya Gambo Sawaba and the key role she played among the three women who participated in negotiation for Nigeria's independent and fought tirelessly for the enfranchisement of Northern Nigeria women (Adadu, 2004, Azuike, 2005). Despite the role played by Hajiya Gambo Sawaba in her political struggles and relentless effort to reshape Nigeria's history, Northern

Nigeria women were still not given the right to vote like their counterparts in the south until the 1979 constitution institutionalized the rights to vote (Azuike, 2005).

The first and second republics had no significant representation of women in both the legislative and executive arms of the government. In the fourth republic, of the one hundred and nine senators in the federal legislature, three women representing 2.8%, were elected in 1999, four (3.7%) in 2003, eight (7.3%) in 2007, seven (6.4%) in 2011, eight (7.3%) in 2015, in 2019, only seven (6.4%) women were elected and 2023, only 3 (2.7%) were elected (Quadri, 2015). These figures are not so different in the counterpart chamber, the House of Representatives. Out of the three hundred and sixty members, only twelve (3.3%) seats were won by women in 1999. There was a slight improvement in 2003 with twenty-one (5.8%) women. This improvement was sustained in 2007 with 25 (6.9%) women, and 26 (7.2%) in 2011. In 2015, the number of women in the national legislature's lower chamber dropped to 14 representing 3.8%. Figures in 2019 show that only 11 (3.05%) women won elections, indicating a further drop in women's representation while in 2023 with 14 (3.8%) according to the International Parliamentary Union (IPU 2018).

The climax of female political participation held in Taraba State, was in 2011, when a woman won the northern senatorial district election. The woman was later appointed as minister for Women Affairs by the then-president in 2015. However, she contested in the 2015 gubernatorial

elections and lost to a male opponent. This loss was attributed to religious and cultural beliefs that forbid women to lead men (Tama, 2022). In another instance, a woman contested and won membership to the state House of Assembly in 2011 representing Nguroje Constituency under the Central Senatorial District. In the southern senatorial district of Taraba state, the highest elective post won by a woman was a councillorship position in 2017. Results from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), show that from 1999 to date no woman ever won an elective position in the Senate, House of Representatives, House of Assembly, and Local Government Chairperson in Taraba South Senatorial District, for example, all the thirteen (13) candidates that contested for senate seat in 2019 were men and in 2023 all the ten (10) candidates were also men. In the 2019 House of Assembly election, out of 79 candidates, only five (5) were women who contested under different political parties while in 2023 all fifty (50) candidates were men. A similar trend was observed in the House of Representative positions.

Historically, women experience discrimination that puts them at an economic disadvantage. Agbalajobi (2009) emphasizes that lack of finance hinders effective female participation in Nigerian politics. Political campaigns are expensive and require solid financial backing for success. A large portion of the Nigerian female population is not as financially strong as their male counterparts, and political financiers or sponsors of politicians prefer male candidates to female ones (Anifowose, 2004). A report from Jide

(2022) shows that the total expenses for the House of Assembly elections ranged from ₦600,000 - ₦2,000,000, House of Representatives; ₦2,500,000 - ₦10,000,000, Senate; ₦3,500,000 - ₦20,000,000, Governorship; ₦21,000,000 - ₦50,000,000 and Presidency; ₦40,000,000- ₦100,000,000. Women's hopes to participate in elections are usually dashed by their limited access to credit and money (Luka, 2011). Only a few women may have the financial means to sustain themselves in politics, which forces them to rely on their husbands or other male family members if they were to actively participate in politics. The average woman finds it expensive to buy nomination forms and meet all the other financial demands of electioneering. Nigeria has a capital-intensive political system, which makes it difficult for average women to participate in politics. These scenarios motivated the investigation into the reason that only a few women participate in elective positions.

Research questions: This study sought to answer one research question;

- i. What is the major factor affecting women's participation in elective politics?

Theoretical background of the study

Liberal Feminist Theory

Liberal feminism is a form of feminist theory that has been instrumental in fueling the women's rights movement and the significant legal, educational, and policy initiatives that have increased women's rights in diverse contexts grounded in the political

traditions of liberalism. Liberal feminist thought emerged from the strong philosophical traditions invested in liberty and extended these conceptions to women. The key early figures influential in the efforts to extend important components of liberal political thought specifically to women include Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), and Harriet Taylor Mill (1806-1858).

The basic assumptions of Liberal feminist theory include working to increase equality, expanding human choice, eliminating gender stratification, ending sexual violence, and promoting sexual freedom. According to Ako-Nai (2005, p:489), “feminism is characterized by looking at the relationship that exists between men and women, in which women are always sidelined in respect to societal cultural norms, religion, and political beliefs. The inequality created is the catalyst for the feminist ideology in pursuance of the women’s liberation from all institutions that limited their self-expression”.

Traditional notions of women’s inferiority to men still rule in Nigeria as well as in Taraba South Senatorial District due to broad support for cultural practices that promote subordination. In terms of social, political, economic, and religious issues, men continue to dominate. Women’s political endeavours, accomplishments, and societal achievements are hardly ever acknowledged. It is essential for women to actively participate in political decision-making so that they have their entitled status, responsibilities, and rights (Tama et al., 2022). In terms of political participation

in elective positions, income, labour force participation, and the proportion of seats in parliament, women in Nigeria continue to face less favourable conditions than men (Azuh et al., 2014). For women to attain their right to equality in Nigeria, liberal feminism must receive more emphasis. The theory goes further to postulate that there should not be any kind of favouritism to any gender; men and women should enjoy the same rights, opportunities and privileges on equal terms.

Liberal feminists generally seek solutions through changes in legislation that ensure the rights of individuals are honored (Giddens, 2006). Nigerian women encounter challenges in politics due to a lack of internal democracy within all political parties in the country (Akpan 2015), making it very difficult for women to emerge as party flag bearers during the primaries, and if they succeed, they often end up losing in the general election. In alignment with this theory, feminists advocate for the active participation of women in electoral politics at all levels, considering this the standard for removing barriers to achieving parity with men in politics. Applying this theory to the study examines how economic power impacts women's participation in elective positions and addresses this challenge by recommending legislation that encourages more women to engage in political office in Taraba. Interestingly, adopting this theory to some extent may influence religious-cultural beliefs that restrict women from the political arena.

Methodology

Research Design: The study adopted the sequential mixed-method approach. In this approach, qualitative data was first obtained, after which quantitative data was obtained based on the qualitative information (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Rationale for using mixed methods is for the enrichment, instrument validity and reliability, treatment integrity, and significance enhancements (Collins, et. al. 2006). The quantitative data were obtained using a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. This is a research approach in which the researchers investigate the situation in a population at a certain point in time (Bethlehem 1999). The researchers collect data on only a small part of the population to get information about the sampled elements of the population as a whole.

Population for the Study: The study was conducted in Taraba South Senatorial District, which comprises five (5) Local Government Areas (LGAs), namely, Wukari, Takum, Donga, Ibi, and Ussa LGAs. These LGAs have a total population of 660,220 adults of voting age.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sampling was done in three stages. In the first stage, the researcher purposively selected five participants for the key Informant interviews, one participant from each of the LGAs. These were selected among politicians with lots of experience, including women leaders and other party officials. The selection was based on their experience with party primaries

and general elections. The next stage involved sample size calculation using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table. This table provides a guide on the expected sample based on the population size. Going by this table, a population size of 660,220 or above is recommended to have a sample size of 384 participants. This number was proportionately distributed across three clusters: INEC officials (100), party officials (100), and party members (184). In the last stage, the number of participants in each cluster was selected using simple random sampling without replacement. For fair representation, the 384 participants were distributed across the five (5) Local Government Areas that made up the senatorial district.

Instruments of data collection

The instrument used for the collection of data in this study was the Key Informant Interview (KII) and a questionnaire. The interview instruments used include a structured interview question guide and an audio recorder to document the interview. Two (2) questions were asked, i. *From your own experience in politics, what is the key ingredient for women participating in elective politics?* ii. *In a few words, can you explain why the majority of women do not participate in elective politics?* All the above questions were open-ended. The structured questionnaire contained 17 items and was divided into two sections. The first section asked respondents about their demographic characteristics, such as sex, age, marital status, educational qualification, occupation, etc. The second section examined how poor economic status

hinders women's participation in political elective positions. The items in this section were drawn in Likert's 5-points response format that ranged from strongly agreed (1), agreed (2), undecided (3), disagreed (4), and strongly disagreed (5).

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Four experts validated the questionnaire: two from the Department of Measurement and Evaluation at Federal University Wukari and two from the Department of Psychology at Kwararafa University Wukari. Their corrections enhanced the structure and wording of the questionnaire and KII interview guide. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient, which yielded a coefficient index of 0.86, indicating how closely a set of items functions together as a group, reflecting greater internal consistency.

Method of Data Collection

The study employs both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, including questionnaires and key informant interviews (KIIs). The participants selected for the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were informed beforehand to create a conducive environment for the interview. All interviews were conducted in English, tape-recorded, transcribed, and coded for analysis. The interview sessions lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The outcome of the interview was used to prepare the questionnaire for further data collection. Five research assistants, who

are familiar with each Local Government Area (LGA) in Taraba South Senatorial District, were utilized, and a total of 384 questionnaires were distributed to gather responses from the participants and were subsequently retrieved by the researcher. The researcher supervised the administration and collection of the questionnaires.

Data and statistical analysis: Thematic analysis was used for the qualitative data arising from the KII. The data was presented verbatim to preserve the original thoughts of the respondents from interviews while outlining the key points presented by the interviewee. Responses from the questionnaires were analyzed using the descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. The mean cutoff mark was set at 2.50 for accepting an item as a common response. The analysis was done using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

Results

Data for this study were gathered from respondents with diverse socio-demographic characteristics. The respondents comprised 53.7% males and 46.3% females, 30.4% of them were aged 40-49 years old, and 29.3% were 29-39 years old. About 30% of them had secondary education, and 28.8% had tertiary education. Many (49.3%) were married, 44.3% were single, and 3.6% were divorced. A good number (33.5%) were farmers, 29% were civil/public Servants; 22.1% of them had lived in Southern Taraba for 31-40 years, and 24.89% had lived for ≤ 10 years.

Interview Results

Major factor affecting women's participation in elective politics

Theme: Lack of financial power

The major theme obtained from the key informant interview as the major factor for women's participation in elective politics was the lack of economic power. The five participants highlighted this factor in their various responses. A 45-year-old Female Key Informant in Wukari had this to say:

Most women in this area are weak financially or in this part of the State and they find it very difficult to finance their activities even though there have been relieve of some of the cost or cut in the purchase of expression and nomination forms and some instance they pay half and in some situation they paid nothing, still at that they find it very difficult to meet up some financial obligations (KII, B1, Age 45, Wukari).

Another informant corroborated this view in his response:

As a result of lack of economic power, many women do not have the interest to engage in elective politics, since money has taken over every aspect of life, especially politics. In addition to that, most women in our senatorial zone are poor and rarely engage in different business ventures in order to empower themselves financially (KII, B5, Age 36, Donga).

Subtheme 1: High financial demand for elective politics

The thematic analysis highlighted that elective politics has high financial implications, and this tends to discourage women in the study area who generally have low incomes. A 50-year-old key respondent had this to say:

In Africa and Nigeria in particular, participating in elective positions is highly financial demanding and so you will believe with me that Southern Taraba is one of the most poverty stricken area in Nigeria. So majority of our women here are into petty business, in civil service not highly placed in a position where they can earn and save a reasonable amount of money to enable them purchase a nomination forms at a party level, to sponsor themselves at party level that will enable them participate in primaries and win and become the standard flag-bearer of their party and to sponsor the main general election where they will contest with other parties. I felt that base on the financial high need to prosecute their electioneering activity is one of the factors that deter female counterpart in this area as contestants (KII, B2, Age 50, Ussa).

Subtheme 2: Manipulative nature of elective politics

One of the interview participants is of the view that winning elective posts depends on one's ability to manipulate the process through financial inducement. According to him, women do not usually have the financial power to engage in such effective manipulations. In his words:

Women felt where they would get the money since politics these days is gearing toward money whether you win an election or not provided you have the money you can manipulate your way out and you will be given the chance (KII, B3, Age 37, Takum).

Subtheme 3: Relegation of women to the private domain

A 45-year-old Key informant believed that the poor economic status of women

can be attributed to the culture that relegates women to the unpaid domestic domain. This situation leaves them with less financial power and influence to win elective offices, such that political financiers would rather sponsor men than women in elections, because they believe that women do not have a chance of winning.

Women relegation to private domain and also lack of rewarding their labour puts them at a disadvantage economically. Political campaigns this day is gearing toward money and very expensive and women lack financial backings to tread in this path. Societal value assumed that political activities are for men and this makes the sponsors of politicians to prefer male candidates over female ones (KII, B4, Age 45, Ibi).

Quantitative results

The qualitative data obtained were converted to quantitative questions, and

the data are presented in Table 1. The data showed that all the items on economic/financial power affecting women's participation in elective positions in Taraba South Senatorial District were corroborated by the respondents, with mean scores above the cut-off point of 2.50. The standard deviation ranged from 0.67 to 0.89, indicating the opinion of the respondents on each item. (i) Economic power is a key ingredient in participating in elective positions, with a mean value of 4.34. (ii) Financial status, a determinant of a political party membership relevance, 3.96. (iii) Wealthy members are treated specially, 4.21. (iv) Poverty inhibits women from elective politics, 3.76. (v) Women's relegation to the private domain causes their lack of interest in elective positions, with a mean value of 4.26.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation responses on how the economic power affects women's participation in elective positions in politics

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
Economic power is a key ingredient in participating in elective positions	4.34	0.84	Agree
Financial status is a determinant of a political party membership relevance	3.96	0.61	Agree
Wealthy members are treated specially	4.21	0.89	Agree
Poverty inhibits women from elective politics	3.76	0.83	Agree
Women's relegation to the private domain causes their lack of interest in elective positions.	4.26	0.80	Agree

Discussion

This study investigated factors that affect women's participation in elective positions in Taraba South. Qualitative findings revealed that weak financial

power is one major factor that affects women's participation in elective politics in Taraba South Senatorial District. The findings showed that electoral activities have very high

financial demands, making it very difficult for women to finance political activities. A further finding showed that the study area is one of the most economically challenged regions in Nigeria, because of this, many women, who are mostly petty traders and low-earning civil servants, cannot execute the responsibilities of the electioneering process (Akume, 2019; Ajir, 2002). Another finding highlights the manipulative nature of the country's politics, in which individuals with higher financial power tend to buy their way through the process (Van Dijk, 2006; Bryan & Baer, 2005; Etzioni-Halevy, 2017). This scenario usually sees the menfolk more at an advantage over women, who often lack such resources. Further findings suggested that women's poor financial status is due to their relegation to the private or domestic domain, putting them at a disadvantage economically. In addition, political financiers prefer to sponsor male over women contestants, because they believe it would be a more profitable venture for them. This situation often makes them uninterested and/or unexposed to electoral politics, as observed by Anifowose (2004).

The quantitative findings corroborated the view that economic power is a major factor in the electioneering process, and the majority of women are poor and cannot afford election expenses. Financial power plays a crucial role in women contesting elective positions in Southern Taraba and is crucial in determining one's membership of a political party. Many women in the study area live in poverty and barely survive through low-income

endeavours. The findings of this study aligned with Agbalajobi (2009), who emphasized that a lack of finance brings hindrance to effective female participation in Nigerian politics, as a large portion of the Nigerian female population is not as financially strong as their male counterparts. Adetula (2008) observed that political campaigns are expensive and require solid financial support for success. Those contesting high political offices as president, governors, senators, and representatives incur huge campaign expenditures in posters, billboards, media ads, campaign tours, and other logistics.

Conclusion

Poor economic power is the major factor responsible for low women's participation in elective political positions in politics in Taraba South Senatorial District. Both qualitative and quantitative information suggest that high financial demands, poverty, lack of support, and relegation to the domestic domain significantly hinder women's participation in politics. These barriers limit their access to resources, networks, and opportunities necessary for political engagement. Financial constraints and poverty reduce their capacity to fund campaigns or engage in political activities, while societal expectations and domestic responsibilities restrict their time and mobility. Additionally, the lack of institutional and social support further marginalizes women, making it difficult for them to compete on equal footing with their male counterparts. Addressing these challenges is essential to achieving gender equality and

inclusive political representation.

Recommendations

In the light of the above findings, the researcher gives the following recommendations:

1. Government should make it a law that certain elective positions should be reserved exclusively for women.
2. Women who intend to contest for election should be empowered and encouraged financially by government, husbands and family members in order to ease their political expenses.

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