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ASSESSMENT OF MALE POLITICIANS' AND PARTY LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

By

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Abstract:

Women constitute half of world population and contribute immensely to the development of world today. This parity in terms of population has not translated to parity in political leadership in most countries across the globe. This study assessed the male politicians' and party leaders' perceptions on women's political participation and leadership in North Central Nigeria.The study used convenience sampling technique to select a sample of four hundred (400) respondents drawn from selected three (3) LGAs from each of the six (6) north central states making it a total of eighteen (18) LGAs. Five-point Likert scale questionnaire was made into copies and distributed to the respondents. Ordinary Least Square (OLS) was employed to analyze the data collected. The result revealed that gender dynamics within political parties in North Central Nigeria was found to have a positive influence on women's participation and leadership opportunities. While the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of male politicians and party leaders in North Central Nigeria regarding women's political participation and leadership was found to have a negative influence on gender dynamics.The study therefore recommended among others the advocate for policy reforms that actively promote gender equality in political participation secondly, political parties should adopt a strict zero-tolerance policy against any form of harassment or discrimination based on gender.

Keywords: male politicians, party leaders, perceptions, women's political participation, women's leadership, gender dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, being a patriarchal society, has a long history of male-dominated politics. The North Central region, comprising six states (Kwara, Niger, Kogi, Benue, Plateau, and Nasarawa), has not been an exception. Women's political participation and leadership have been constrained by various factors, including cultural and societal norms. Male politicians and

party leaders play a crucial role in shaping these perceptions and influencing women's political involvement (Soetan, 2014).

Historically, Nigerian women have not always been passive political actors. In pre-colonial societies, women played active roles in decision-making processes and held significant political offices (Heywood, 2007). Notable figures such as the Iyalode of Ibadan, EfunsetanAniwura, Moremi of Ile-Ife, and Queen Amina of Zaria exemplify the influential political roles women occupied. However, the advent of colonial rule and subsequent political developments have led to a predominantly male-dominated political scene, with the introduction of policies that marginalised women's political participation (Heywood, 2007).
Women have been continuously fighting for their rights and relevant positions in the political arena through continuous activism, education, and awareness of women's rights (Agbalajobi, 2010). These rights and positions are equivalent to those of their male counterparts. However, only a few have succeeded. The majority of Nigerian women have been unable to achieve their aspirations, mainly due to socio-cultural constraints and lack of support from male political leaders. This has subsequently led to an unequal representation of men and women in the political arena (Kamari, 2019).
In contemporary Nigeria, Johnson and Patel (2021) believed that, the political arena remains significantly skewed in favor of men. This is evident in the low representation of women in major political offices and decision-making positions, which remains disproportionately low. According to Udegbe (2018), women's representation in government since Nigeria's independence in 1960 until the late 1990s hovered around a mere two percent. While there have been marginal improvements in recent years, the representation of women in political leadership positions is still far from reflective of their proportion in the population.
In response to the gender disparities in political participation and representation, various initiatives have been launched. These include the establishment of the Women Political Empowerment Office, the Nigeria Women Trust Fund, and the Women Lobby Group. Furthermore, the introduction of an Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) gender policy and the organisation of the Nigeria Women Strategy Conference signify concerted efforts to address the challenges faced by women in the political sphere. Despite these initiatives, challenges persist, underscoring the need for more effective strategies to ensure women's equitable participation in politics.
The challenges to gender equality in Nigerian politics are multifaceted and rooted in historical, cultural, and institutional factors. While efforts to promote women's political participation and representation are commendable, achieving substantive gender equality requires a holistic approach that addresses the underlying socio-cultural norms and practices that perpetuate gender disparities. Examining ths male and political party’s leader’s perceptions is crucial for identifying the structural and institutional factors that perpetuate gender disparities in political representation.

Based on the forgoing, the study was guided by the following research objectives:

i. To analyze the gender dynamics within political parties in North Central Nigeria, exploring the biases and practices that hinder women's participation, nomination, and leadership opportunities.
ii. To explore the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of male politicians and party leaders in North Central Nigeria regarding women's political participation and leadership, and their influence on gender dynamics and women's representation.

These objectives were converted into hypotheses which were stated in null form as follows:

Ho_1: Gender dynamics within political parties in North Central Nigeria does not contribute to the limited participation of women, with biases and discriminatory practices hindering women's access to party nominations and leadership positions.

Ho_2: Perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of male politicians and party leaders in North Central Nigeria has not significantly influence gender dynamics, with more gender-inclusive attitudes leading to greater opportunities for women's political participation and leadership.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender Dynamics

Gender dynamics as defined by Akabogu et al. (2015) is the social, economic, political, and cultural attributes, perceptions, and opportunities that a society associates with being male or female. Similarly, Risman (2018) and Thompson and Walker (2019) provide insights into how individuals might exhibit different gender dynamic expressions in professional settings compared to personal relationships, pointing to the adaptability and situational dependence of gender roles. This adaptability challenges the notion of gender as a fixed attribute, suggesting instead that it is subject to change and reinterpretation depending on the context.

Women's Political Participation

It is necessary to make a conceptual clarification of the term "political participation" in order to enhance our understanding of the subject matter. Political participation is one of the fundamental ideas of a democratic society and an essential component required for ensuring the stability and legitimacy of every political system (Agbaje, 2019; Kumari and Kidwai, 2019). It is the sine qua non of democracy because democracy involves a commitment to equal opportunity for men and women to develop their individual capacities. Political participation is crucial to the determination of the control of power and the extent to which individual members of society share, take part, or get involved in the life of that society (Agbaje, 2019). It occupies a vital place in democratic governance to the extent that its denial to a substantial part of the population can engender some negative reactions. Thus, democracy is inconceivable without political participation (Kumari & Kidwai, 2019). However, the focus of this study is on women political participation and this study conceptualized it as the involvement of women in political processes, including voting, running for political office, participating in political campaigns, joining political parties, and engaging in advocacy and activism on political issues.

Empirical Review

Perception regarding Women Political Participation

Tama and Maiwuya (2022) examined the theoretical perspectives of patriarchy and liberal feminism to be able to draw a conclusion on the level of women's participation in politics. The aim of the study, therefore, was to find out why women are marginalised and the factors responsible for the low level of women's political participation in Taraba state, Nigeria. To achieve this, documentary research using descriptive and content analysis was generated from secondary data. This study reveals that some women that contested for key political positions were either refused to be voted for by the men or see as weaker folks for governance. In addition, some groups of politicians, especially men, rejected a call for a gender equality bill, calling it a means for women's empowerment. Most importantly, this study also discovered that Nigerians see religious and cultural beliefs as being superior to Nigeria’s constitution, thereby discouraging women and creating a low level of representation for women in government when compared to men. There is need for women to be enlightened on their

potentials, study the nation's constitution thoroughly and avoid intimidation by men on political participation.

Omodia, Erunke, and Shuaibu (2020) examined the Role of Women in Nigerian Politics: Conceptual and Theoretical Issues for an Enhanced Political Participation in the Fourth Republic" said that the inferiority complex of women regarding active political participation and representation constitute the bane of their study. However, it was argued that the inferiority nature of women generally was a function of chauvinistic nature of men to perpetuate their domination on them in all ramifications. This gender bias in Nigeria's political system is often traced to the advent of colonialism in Nigeria. Thus, the western cultural notion of colonialism woven around male superiority reflected in their relations with Nigerians.

The study adopted both conceptual and theoretical analysis of issues of political participation and representation to ascertain how women are generally dominated by men in the scheme of things. The most critical element of their discourse is however that women are, and have been side-lined in the political scheme of things in Nigeria and this state of affairs spells a dangerous omen for the Nigerian system which is now literally dominated and controlled by men. In the past, experience has shown, of course as demonstrated in the study, that women's political roles have contributed immensely in the shaping of the Nigerian politics not only in democratic governance but also during the pre-colonial era. So, it will be unthinkable to wish away the critical efforts of women in the making of Nigerian state while arrogating political powers to the male folk. It is also unhealthy to ascribe political powers strictly to men in this era of globalization where the role of women in global politics is considered to be relevant in overall world peace, tranquility and mutual co-existence. In line with the above discovery, the study recommends that there should be equality in the sharing of political offices on the basis of quota system between competing candidates.

Gender Dynamics within Political Parties that Hindered Women participation

Musa (2019) examines the functions of women in political parties in Ekiti State. The study adopted a qualitative research design in which an in-depth interview was combined with documentary evidence. Primary data was sourced using interviews, while secondary data was sourced from documents such as the Nigerian constitution, the Independent National Electoral Commission, and relevant documents from the political parties' websites. Through purposive and snowball sampling techniques, four political parties were selected, and using a semi-structured interview, a total of 13 people within the four political parties were interviewed, along with two focus groups within the four political parties. The study also incorporated relevant literature and theory; the theory of liberal feminism was used in the study. Findings showed that women in political parties in Ekiti State perform roles such as spiritual, mobilizing, and executive ones. Women functions in political parties are both within and outside the parties. Furthermore, the status of women in political parties in Ado Ekiti has not reflected most of the global laws and declarations on women. The result of the study showed that decision-making roles are occupied mostly by men and have experienced a slight increase in the present administration. It also revealed that women have access to financial, economic, and material resources, and these resources are given based on individual choices. Similarly, Akabogu (2015) investigated the reason for the delay in achieving affirmative action in Nigeria. The descriptive survey research method was utilized, with questionnaires as the instrument for data collection. This stratified random sampling technique was adopted in selecting the sample. Two hundred and sixty (260) candidates, both elected and aspiring, at the local and national level from five states in Nigeria were used for the study. The collected data was analysed using the mean and standard deviation. While analysis of co-variance (ANCOVA) was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 Apha level of significance. Akabogu found out that affirmative action has been difficult to achieve as men

dominate the affairs of politics in the country. The consideration of the above study is relevant to this present study in that it emphasises equitable and reasonable representation of women in politics and decision-making.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the survey research design employing a five-point Likert scale questionnaire and oral interview. This questionnaire was subjected to descriptive statistics, validity and reliability tests using the Cronbach alpha, and the results of the tests were reported in the next section. The population of the study selected from the three (3) major LGAs from each of the six (6) north central states making it a total of eighteen (18) LGAs. The total population of the study area according to the 2006 population census is four million, one hundred and fifteen thousand, five hundred and thirty-three (4,115,533) People. Using Taro Yamane (1973) formula to obtain the sample size study therefore adopted a convenience sampling technique to select a sample of four hundred (400) respondents, specifically 70 from Nasarawa state, 66 from Abuja, 66 from Kogi state, 66 from Kwara state, 60 from Benue state and 60 from Plateau state. The study applied the ordinary least square to analyze the data collected from the respondents. The choice of this technique is based on the fact that it is best linear unbiased estimator.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1.0 Ordinary Least Square Regression Result

Coefficients[a]					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.115	.090		1.271	.204
GDPP	.821	.078	.695	10.569	.000
PMPP	-.651	.083	-.565	-7.864	.000

Source: Field Survey, 2024; Computed with SPSS 25

The regression results obtained in table above are interpreted as follows

WOPP = .115 + .821GDPP -.651PMPP

Where:

WOPP= Women Political Participation (Dependent variable)

GDPP = Gender Dynamics within Political Parties

PMPP = Perceptions of Male Politicians and Party Leaders

From the regression result in table above, the results showed that gender dynamics within political parties in North Central Nigeria has a positive influence on women's participation and leadership opportunities, despites all odds with majority of respondents (80.8%) strongly agreed or agreed that women are actively encouraged to participate in leadership roles within political parties in North Central Nigeria.

The finding also showed that, the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of male politicians and party leaders in North Central Nigeria regarding women's political participation and

leadership has negatively influenced gender dynamics, evidence from the negative coefficient of the PMPP (-.651). This is also supported by the overwhelming majority (73.9%) of respondents who believed that the reluctance of male politicians to mentor and support female politicians does indeed contribute to gender disparities in political representation.

Test of Hypotheses

Based on the results of the multiple regression presented in Table 1.0 above, the study verify the research hypotheses formulated in chapter one in order to accept or to reject them as follows:

Hypothesis One

Considering the p-value for the coefficient of GDPP in the table 1.0 above which is .000, the study discovered that .000< .005 level of significance. Therefore, we reject H_0 and conclude that gender dynamics within political parties in North Central Nigeria contribute to the limited participation of women, with biases and discriminatory practices hindering women's access to party nominations and leadership positions.

Hypothesis Two

Considering the p-value for the coefficient of PMPP in the table 1.0 above which is .000, the study discovered that .000< .005 level of significance. Therefore, we reject H_0 and conclude that perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of male politicians and party leaders in North Central Nigeria has not significantly influence gender dynamics and women political participation.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the study revealed that gender dynamics within political parties in North Central Nigeria was found to have a positive and significant influence on women's participation and leadership opportunities. This is an encouraging result, as it suggests that specific aspects of these political environments are fostering greater gender equality and empowering women to take on more significant roles. Factors to these positive gender dynamics are the implemented policies or initiatives aimed at promoting gender balance and inclusivity. This include the quotas for female candidates, 50% cuts off for nomination fees, mentorship programmes, or training opportunities to support women's political development in the region.

It was discovered from the analysis that, the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of male politicians and party leaders in North Central Nigeria regarding women's political participation and leadership was found to have a negative influence on gender dynamics. This suggests that there are some barriers or challenges that women face due to the mindset of these male politicians and leaders stem from a fear of losing power or influence within the political system. Male politicians and leaders who perceive women's increased participation and leadership as a threat to their position are more likely to resist or undermine efforts to promote gender equality.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the findings, the following recommendations are made:

i. To further enhance the positive gender dynamics within political parties in North Central Nigeria and improve women's participation and leadership opportunities, political parties should create dedicated committees or departments focused on gender equality and women's empowerment. These structures can be responsible for monitoring and promoting gender-sensitive policies and practices within the party.

ii. To address the negative influence of male politicians' and party leaders' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs regarding women's political participation and leadership in North Central Nigeria, political parties should adopt a strict zero-tolerance policy against any form of harassment or discrimination based on gender. This policy should be communicated clearly to all party members, including male politicians and party leaders.

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