JOURNAL OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE
ISSN Print: 2992-2763 – ISSN Online: 2992-4618 | Vol. 3, No. 2 / June, 2025
https://www.jopd.com.ng

WOMEN AND ELECTION CAMPAIGN VIOLENCE IN IBADAN, NIGERIA

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Abstract
In this paper, I looked at the analysis and understanding of violence against women during election campaign in Ibadan metropolis, and its effects on the general participation of women in politics general. The paper attempted to answer questions relating to the nature of violence against women during election campaign, the effect of violence against women during election campaign, how women in active politics are protecting themselves against violence during election campaign, and the motivation that keeps the women in politics. The study found that access to public spaces for women is a major hinderance to women participation in politics; women in politics also suffer similar forms of violence like women in other shared public spaces and the motivation for women in politics is the struggle to ensure woman occupy their rightful places within the political landscape. Primary data was derived from in-depth interviews with women in active politics. Direct participatory and non- participatory observation in political campaign rallies within the metropolis formed part of the data for the study. Quantitative data derived from primary sources were analyzed using thematic and content analysis. Findings were discussed in simple everyday language to ensure appreciable understanding by readers beyond academia, and for easier policy scaling.

Keywords: Women, Participation. Politics, election. Violence

Introduction

Women in the Ibadan metropolis, like women in other societies have been involved in maintaining and sustaining the political and electioneering processes in the metropolis since the birth of liberal democracy and elections as a means of selecting leaders in Nigeria. Women in the metropolis have been at the forefront of campaigns and political mobilization; they formulate campaign strategies and lead in the campaigning process (Gbadebo, 2015). However, it has been observed that despite the heavy involvement in the political process in the metropolis, the participation of women in politics, especially in campaigns, have been largely reduced due to the violent nature of the campaign venues around the metropolis (Bamidele, R., Garuba, R., 2017). Democracy, like other forms of government is prone to violence, especially assaults and molestations during campaigns and rallies (Igwe and Amadi, 2020). However, election violence tends to affect women more than men all over the world. While men also suffer violence during election campaign rallies, the forms of violence men suffer are distinct from the kind of violence women suffer. The forms of violence suffered by women are more traumatic than those of the men. Women tend to suffer more sexual abuse and harassment than the menfolk during election campaign rallies. It is therefore understandable that only a handful of women in Ibadan and other places attend the rallies and campaigns due to the manifestations of violence during these rallies and campaigns. The nature and manifestations of electoral violence during campaigns in Ibadan metropolis are in a manner such that it has become difficult for women to participate in the activities (Igwe, 2012).

Drawing on social learning theory, which aptly captures the main argument of this paper, the argument presented here is that attitudes and behaviors are social constructs, and this is why they are not universal. The acceptable norms in every society are based on the prevalent culture

in such society. When a behaviour is tolerated for too long, it becomes a norm, and eventually the society takes it as something normal in such a society. The social learning theory postulates that violence against women, either in public spaces or domestic is socially constructed. It is not natural or inherited in men, it is taught to them by society or culture. The submission of the social learning succinctly captures the argument of this paper that in as inasmuch as violence against women are not natural in men, and since it has been established that it's a learned behavior among men, the behavior can also be unlearned. In this case, a concerted effort by stakeholders and parties involved in the fight and advocacy can help reduce significantly the occurrence of violence against women in public spaces, including during election campaign rallies in Ibadan metropolis.)

This paper, on this background seeks to understand the relationship between women's participation in politics and violence during election campaigns, and how women are negotiating the campaign space despite the violence they face during election campaign rallies. This paper therefore, seeks to answer three interrelated questions about the manifestations of violence during election campaigns and how it affects women's participation in politics and electioneering campaigns in Ibadan metropolis.

Methodology

This Study is an ethnographical and exploratory study that seeks to add to the understanding of electoral violence and women's participation in politics. The collection of primary data for this study will be in two throngs: i. in-depth interviews with carefully selected key informants (this includes women who participate actively in politics ii. Participatory and non-participatory observation in campaign rallies of the major political parties in Ibadan metropolis.

The selection of participants for the field research was done in two steps; the first step was to identify women in politics in the Ibadan metropolis. As noted, this step was to identify and speak to women who have been fully involved in politics in the Ibadan metropolis for one year or above. This demography formed the bulk of the key informants for the nature of violence against women during election campaigns, and the effect of violence during campaigns on women's participation in Politics. Respondents without substantiated evidence of sustained participation in politics and election campaigns for over one year were considered for this sample. This step considers time, status, and involvement in political activities for the selection of samples. The second step involved talking to other actors in electoral campaigns. The actors in this demography include male actors in politics, media practitioners, social workers working in gender spaces, officials of the ministry of Women's affairs and security agencies.

Definition of Election Campaign Violence

Election campaign violence includes various violent actions and intimidation during elections, usually intended to reduce voter involvement or challenge the legitimacy of candidates. In Ibadan, Nigeria, this issue has serious effects on women's political participation, as violence mainly impacts women candidates and their backers. This issue has posed e serious setback to women's political engagement as violence directly impacts the female candidates and their supporters. Even though recently, women openly shown their support for female politicians but their involvement in politics is limited due to intimidation, threats, violent occurrences, and societal repercussions, which, according to a study, leads to fear and reinforces male control and dominance in politics (Agbemuko,2023). Also, past occurrences of electoral violence in Nigeria have further promoted an air of distrust, making it harder for women to gather votes and achieve representation (Alokpa,2017). It is expedient to implement effective and accurate strategies against violent occurrences to promote avenues for free and fair elections, as well as a

democratic nation where women are seen and their voices are heard, and actively participate in political decisions of the country.

Women's Participation in Campaign: Why Does it Matter?

> *Women are the main reason why we go for campaigns. They make the campaign space come alive with their melodious tunes and gyrations" (Ademola Raji,2023)*

Women play important roles during campaign rallies beyond what is described by the respondent above. Although it can be argued that the singing and merry making is also an integral part of campaign rallies, the role women play in canvassing for votes, talking to people, and moving from house to house to convince no members to vote for their parties and candidates dwarfs the singing and merry making. Okunade (2008) argued that other major contributions of women to campaign rallies are usually overshadowed by the singing and the dancing. The singing and dancing usually take the center stage. Akintunde (2017) mentioned a few of the role's women play during election campaign rallies to include singing, dancing, organization, public relations, and canvassing. Okunade(2008) maintained that women in politics are solely responsible for the organization of these events as women as been proven to the best organizers of events. The role of women in the events is usually overshadowed by the general perception that they are just meant to sing and entertain the crowd during campaign rallies. When asked about the roles of women in campaign rallies, Sodiq Akintunde (2023), who is a youth leader in the All-Progressive Congress in Lagelu local government, had this to say;

"Women are the main movers of our campaign events. They mobilize people to the campaign grounds and take care of the key logistics to make the events run smoothly. They are the salts that make the events tasty."

It can therefore be seen clearly that the participation of women in campaign rallies goes beyond mere singing and dancing; they are important parts of the campaign planning and execution. They play significant roles in bringing people together.

Forms of Violence Against Women During the Election Campaign

Violence against women in public places has been at the forefront of the debate on gender-based violence. Accessing the public space in many places is akin to venturing into danger zone for some women. The UN Women (2021) defines violence against women as any form of action that can inflict bodily injury, traumatic experience on women. Although violence against women is not limited to the violence carried out against women alone, findings have shown that the highest record of violence against women are carried out by men (Ajayi, 2010). According to a study by Okedare, O, and Fawole, I (2023), on the prevalence of physical, sexual and psychological intimate partner violence, the findings of their work shows that IPV is common among young women living in the slums in Ibadan than in the non-slum areas, and the rate of violence perpetuated against women by men against is four times higher than the violence perpetuated by women against men. The focus of this paper is not to measure the degree of violence against women. However, it is particularly important to set a clear background to understand the flow of gender-based violence in the study area (Ibadan metropolis).

Categorization of Violence Against Women During Election Campaign Rallies

Categorization of violence against women during election campaigns, according to the UN Women report (2021), is;

Physical violence: such as hitting, slapping, pushing and shoving, and indiscriminate touching.

> *"One of the major challenges we face as women during election campaign rallies is brutality, especially when we have a fracas with an opposition party. Although it doesn't happen more often, when it happens, the women are mostly affected You know we are not as strong as the men, if we are to say the truth, they target us to get to our men. If they cannot get me, they torture the women to punish them (Oluremi Adeleke,2023)"*

The Law Insider (2020) defines physical violence to mean the intentional use of physical force or the threat of physical force against another person that results in physical, sexual, and psychological harm to the other party. The World Health Organization provides a similar but more encompassing perspective described describes physical violence as when an individual or group of people attacks or threatens to attack an individual or group physically. This may include the use of a weapon or not. The definition of the WHO rightly explains the kind of physical violence women suffer during election campaign rallies in Ibadan. The definition negates the argument that the argument that men who perpetrate this violence don't carry weapons or don't hit the women with women. However, the usual touching and grabbing that seems to be harmless to the people doing it is a physical violence against women (Rufai,2018). The reactions of the men who attend campaign rallies to the question of whether they had ever been involved in physical violence against women during election campaign rallies have been either denial or feigning ignorance of what they were doing. According to Akintunde Sodiq, a youth leader of the All Progressives Congress in Lagelu Local Government;

> "*Anytime we received cases like that from our female members, The accused member usually says they don't know that the women find Is it offensive, or that it violence against them?"*

Sexual Violence: The forms of sexual violence women who attend political campaigns in Ibadan includes groping, grabbing, and indiscriminate touching. The UN women described sexual violence as any form of violence that alludes to sexual exploitation of the female gender. This includes groping, grabbing, kissing, inappropriate touching and in extreme cases, rape (2021). The kind of sexual violence women suffer in many spaces, including the public space, is similar across the world. The severity and the intervals of the occurrence of this violence depends largely on how laws and legislations on sexual violence are upheld in every society. In the case of Nigeria, the law against sexual violence is different and is more stringent from one sub-national to another. For instance, the laws against sexual violence in Lagos are stricter and more effective than in Oyo state, that the capital is just one hundred and twenty kilometers away in Ibadan. It is, therefore, more difficult to commit a sexual crime and get away with it in Lagos than in Ibadan. According to the Lagos state Protection Against Domestic and Sexual Law (section 287 of the criminal law of Lagos state), "Any person who sexually touches another person without consent with any part of the body or with anything else, if found guilty, will be sentenced to prison for three years". Section 264 of the Lagos prescribes life imprisonment for rape. The examples of the law against sexual violence in Lagos are to show the gravity o sexual violence offense and how different societies, even within the same country, addresses the offense.

Findings of this paper shows that rape is not a common form of sexual violence experienced by women during election campaigns in Ibadan. The prevalent form of sexual violence against women during election campaign rallies is groping, grabbing, and inappropriate touching. When asked about the forms of violence they encountered during campaign rallies, a respondent, Funmilayo Oyalami, who is the women's leader for the All Progressive Congress (APC) in Ona-Ara local government of Oyo state, answered thus;

ISSN Print: 2992-2763 – ISSN Online: 2992-4618 | Vol. 3, No. 2 / June, 2025
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> *"Our people face all forms of violence during rallies. That is one major reason we have restricted participation in rallies to young and middle-aged women who are agile and can protect themselves. You know, like in other gatherings too, some bad people will want to take advantage of the situation to do things like touching your breast, smacking your buttocks, and some even go as far as grabbing your breast. We have never recorded a case of rape within our group I don't know if it happens with other groups, but not within our group. You know campaign activities usually take place in the afternoon and open places, maybe that is why the bad people are not trying to rape women, because I know they can do it if they have the chance"*

Verbal Violence: this form of violence includes whistling, cat-calling, insults and name-calling. Responding to the question on the kind of violence, Alhaja Romoke said;

> *"You have to be strong-willed as a woman to be on the campaign ground because those who cannot say things to you in other settings seize the opportunity to say things to you. Then there are the people in the areas where the campaigns take place, calling you a prostitutes, a divorcee and things like that. You have to develop a thick skin and don't pay attention to whatever they are saying. We deal with those small boys by talking them down too."*

Verbal violence is not regarded as a form of gender-based violence, especially by those who attend campaign rallies. The men, and in some instances the women, also believe that words don't kill. However, the women at the receiving end of the feel traumatized by the words. A traumatizing word is a form violence against. According to Mrs. Oluremi Adeleke;

> *"The people who say these words to women during campaign rallies don't know how hurtful they can be. For instance, I am a minister of God and I don't get myself involved in any rubbish, imagine how it makes me feel when people call me names like prostitute, simply, I follow my passion, which is politics- a passion I don't even make money from."*

Navigating the patriarchal space: How Women Face Violence During Election Campaign Rallies

The pertinent question to answer is how women in active politics in Ibadan metropolis over the years have managed to remain in the public space and attend election campaign rallies. It has been established by the findings of this paper that the election campaign rally space in Ibadan metropolis is a patriarchal space. It's a space dominated by men who are not ready to yield, where has been over the years perceived to be their space by women.

Women in active politics have devised means and ways to protect themselves from, or at least reduce to the minimum, the incidence of violence against women during election campaign rallies in Ibadan metropolis. The methods devised by these women are not the easy way out, but these methods have proven to be effective over the years and have been instrumental in reducing the incidence of violence against women during campaign rallies in the absence of strong legislation and stiff punishment for perpetrators by the law. The findings of this paper revealed that women who attend election campaign rallies in Ibadan do the following to protect themselves from violence;

- They take extra precautions during the rallies, unlike their male counterparts, who are usually carefree
- They attend rallies in groups and, in many instances, in uniform wear for easy identification

- The party provides extra security details for the women during campaign rallies
- Their male counterparts provide cover for them to protect them from violence
- Law enforcement agents provide security and protection for every attendee during election campaign rallies, which also include women

The measures adopted by the women have provided basic protection for them so far, however, it has not put a stop, or at least reduced to the barest minimum, the violence women face during campaign rallies (Adesina, 2023). There is call for more orientation of the members of the society and men who attend election n campaign rallies on how to relate with women in the space with respect and dignity, and more importantly, the legislation and implementation of stiff penalties for the offense of violence against women, either during election campaign rallies or anywhere else.

Social stigma associated with violence against women

The violence during elections against women has become a dreary stigma in the society that has become inevitable and difficult to eradicate during election campaigns, particularly in Ibadan, Nigeria. In a society that is referred to as a man's world, violence done against women is nothing tangible; rather, the victim is being blamed, which affects and discourages them from getting the needed help to prevent a repeat of such occurrences. Further shows that strong patriarchal views common in many Nigerian communities make this stigma worse, promoting a culture of silence and shame about both domestic and public violence against women (Oduola, 2018). Also, these social views can lower the effectiveness of laws meant to protect women, since cultural beliefs often matter more than legal protections (Oyibo, 2017). Moreover, the cultural beliefs and social views have more weight compared to the legal laws of the country, which results in the ineffectiveness of the law to cater to the needs of women in politics. These views and beliefs pose a hindrance to effectively and efficiently tackling gender -based violence, accentuating the urgency to review the legal system, societal views, and beliefs to protect women who participate in electoral processes in Ibadan, Nigeria.

The Motivating Factors: What Keeps the Women Going?

Going from the basic assumption of this paper, that violence against women hinders women's participation in election campaign rallies. It is abounded in literature that one of the biggest stumbling blocks to women's participation in politics is violence against women. The findings of this paper, however show that the number of women participating in election campaigns over the years has been on the increase. Though respondents were unable to provide accurate data on the increase, and there are no records of attendance in election campaign rallies by political parties or government agencies, the estimate given by the respondents shows that there has been an appreciable increase in the number of women participating in election campaign rallies over the years.

Certain factors are attributed to the increase in the number of women participating in election campaign rallies; among the factors are:

- Monetary inducement: women who attend election campaign rallies usually get paid, and by this, some of the women approach the attendance as a form of occupation and treat the attendant violence as an occupational hazard.
- Passion for politics: many of the women who attend election campaign rallies have a passion for political participation, and no amount of violence and intimidation can stop them from exploring their passion.

- Taste for adventure: some set of women attend election campaign rallies for the frills and the thrills. The adrenaline rush that they feel within their body system during the events is what attracts this set of women to attend election campaign rallies.
- Change makers always devise means to get involved in matters that border on their wellbeing. Women in this category brave all the odds to attend election campaign rallies in order to be part of the decision-making process.
  Party members see as a form of obligation they owe to their political parties to attend campaign rallies and contribute their quotas to the success of the party at the polls.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper is to understand the effect of violence against women in active politics on their participation in election campaign rallies. The main assumption of the paper setting out us that the number of women attending election campaign rallies over the years has reduced significantly due to the level of violence women encounter during election campaign rallies. Another assumption of the paper is that women's participation during election campaign rallies is limited to singing and dancing. The finding from the data however shown that despite the attendant violence witnessed by women during election campaign rallies, the number of women participating have been on the increase over the years in Ibadan, and that the roles women play during election campaign rallies go beyond dancing and singing, as they are usually the brains behind the successfully organization of the events. Women plan and organize the event and ensure the success of the event. The argument and recommendation of this paper is that authorities should listen to women in public spaces, including those participating in election campaign rallies, to create policies and legislations that will make the public space safer for women. Political parties should have it in their constitutions to impose penalties for sexual and physical violence against women in their parties. Parties should always include in their provisions the protection for their female members during rallies. Implementation of the law against sexual and physical violence should be at the forefront of government actions.

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