

Gender Differences and Political Participation in Owerri Zone of Imo State

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of women in the development and political participation of Owerri Zone. Out of 400 distributed questionnaires, 310 were returned and analyzed, alongside oral interviews. The findings demonstrate that women have significantly contributed to Owerri Zone's development. Notably, 26% of respondents (80 participants) attribute women's contributions to agriculture, while 16% (50 participants) highlight their role in the informal sector. Moreover, 13% (40 participants) emphasize women's involvement in the formal sector, and 10% (30 participants) mention their efforts in creating political awareness and contesting equal opportunities with men. An additional 6% (20 participants) acknowledge women holding public offices as a contribution. The study also uncovers factors hindering women's political participation in Owerri Zone. Notably, 45% (140 participants) identify patriarchy as a major obstacle, while 16% (50 participants) point to lower educational attainment. Furthermore, 13% (40 participants) indicate the lack of training and communication skills, and 7% (20 participants) cite limited economic resources as barriers. Additionally, 19% (60 participants) observe that socialization differences between genders affect political participation. The research delves into strategies to encourage women's full political engagement. Respondents propose several approaches, including changing negative perceptions of political women (14%), implementing family governance reform (16%), promoting education/training and women's development (10%), advocating political party and electoral system reforms (19%), granting women a voice in budgetary matters (7%), seeking legal and constitutional reforms (3%), and combining these options (32%). The study underscores the importance of educational programs to dispel stereotypes surrounding women's political involvement.

Keywords: Women, politics, Owerri zone, gender differences

INTRODUCTION

The global demand for gender equality has spurred significant academic discourse regarding women's involvement in politics (Buser et al., 2014; Callahan, 2015). Despite constituting 49:78% of the national population in Nigeria, the representation of women in national politics has consistently remained below 3% (Conner et

al., 2014; Mullen, 2014). This concern becomes more pronounced in Nigeria, particularly since the country's transition to democracy in 1999. The shift from a military regime to civilian democratic governance had led to expectations of a substantial enhancement in women's political participation within the nation (Bessant &

Grasso, 2019; Li & Zhang, 2017; Mahéo et al., 2016). Harnessing ideological, cultural, and metaphysical practices has proven to be a formidable force in the ongoing battle for gender equality. Despite the emergence of modern democracy and the persistent efforts of both forward-thinking individuals and those who advocate for gender sensitivity, countering the prevailing chauvinistic culture has been a complex endeavor (Mahéo & Vissers, 2016). Women's struggle to assert their influence across diverse spheres—economic, social, vocational, and political—has been a consistent theme throughout human development. Regrettably, the efforts have often been suppressed, silencing the fact that African derogatory perceptions of women are both unjust and inhumane. These perceptions have cemented women's confinement within domestic roles, perpetuating a detrimental mindset within society (Bode, 2017; Giugni, 2019; Emmenegger & Manow, 2014).

The issue of women's marginalization within the Nigerian economy and the persistent gender disparities in education, employment, and broader recognition across various life domains continues to fuel substantial discussions. Women in Nigeria have historically endured exploitation, underprivilege, abuse, and relegation, rendering them the most disadvantaged segment of society (Giugni & Grasso, 2021; Stove & Cable, 2017). Despite constituting a significant majority of the population, women often find themselves relegated to a status resembling that of a minority group. They face barriers that restrict their access to careers, participation in public decision-making, and are often perceived as dependent, weak, and inherently submissive (Laperrière & Lepinard, 2016; Kaida et al., 2021). Liu (2020) delves into the historical roots of women's subjugation, suggesting that it does not stem from any inherent inferiority but rather from a historical era dominated by men. The author contends that unlike men, women are compelled to constantly define themselves in relation to their gender, whereas men's masculinity is often assumed. Shorrocks & Grasso (2020) further emphasize this point by noting that womanhood is frequently defined in relation to manhood. In Nigeria, discussions on women's marginalization encompass various aspects, including economic participation, educational opportunities, employment access, and societal perceptions. These debates underscore the urgent need for comprehensive efforts to dismantle these deeply ingrained barriers and foster an environment of equality and inclusivity.

Addressing gender disparities in political participation, especially within Owerri Zone, necessitates a multifaceted approach encompassing long-term political education, empowerment initiatives, and liberation movements tailored to women. This strategy aims to facilitate the seamless integration of women into Nigeria's political landscape, fostering equitable opportunities for the future. It's crucial to acknowledge that within third-world nations like Nigeria, women often constitute an oppressed, exploited, and marginalized group. The gender-based challenges, specifically in political participation, are particularly pronounced in Nigeria and more specifically in Owerri Zone. The crux of these challenges lies in achieving parity with men in political arenas.

This research is dedicated to investigating the obstacles and limitations that contribute to gender-based disparities in political

participation, with a particular focus on women's involvement in political power. The persistence of underrepresentation of women in political participation and their low engagement in Nigerian politics and Owerri Zone underscore the significance of this study. The research endeavors to shed light on these constraints, directing the study's focus effectively. The study holds significance in generating awareness about the pivotal need for full and equal women's participation in politics. By doing so, it contributes to prompting legislative bodies to validate and implement policies that promote gender equality. Moreover, the study aims to elucidate the underlying factors driving political education, liberation movements, and empowerment programs. This exploration is integral to achieving gender balance in political participation. Ultimately, the study strives to pave the way for a more inclusive political landscape, fostering a fair representation of women's voices and perspectives.

The specific objectives are to: (1) Make an assessment of the role played by women in the development of Nigeria since the pre-colonial time. (2) Evaluate the reason for the underrepresentation of women in political participation in Owerri zone. (3) Explore ways of ensuring full participation of women in politics in Owerri zone and at large.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study area and Research Design

The researcher uses descriptive survey method for the study in which questionnaires were administered to the respondents and results responses were gathered to collaborate the findings. The choice of this method is based on the fact that representative sample gives credence for generalization. Owerri is the study area. Owerri which is as the of Imo State and the Eastern part of Nigeria, is located at the heart of Igbo land. It is also the state's largest city, followed by Orlu and Okigwe as second and third respectively. Owerri is approximately 100 square kilometres and (40 square miles) which is bordered by the Otamiri River to the east and the Nworie River to the south. Owerri which is also seen as the capital of Imo State, consists of three local government areas which include Owerri municipal, Owerri North, and Owerri West. The Owerri slogan is Heartland and it is currently referred to as the entertainment capital of Nigeria beauty.

2.2 Population of the Study

Population is the aggregate or totality of the unit in the universe. The 1,590,513 strength of people in Owerri Zone is seen as the population size of both male and female. This number makes up the population of the study but due to time limit and for manageability and empirical conclusion, a sample will be drawn from the population.

2.3 Sample and Sampling Techniques

By this term, it means the process of studying of selected units, people, or objects or even organization from a population so that by studying the sample, we may fairly generalize the end results back to the population from where they were chosen. In regards to this, we are not I to use the population we shall collect from Owerri zone, we shall r use a sample which will be drawn from the total population as stated. The sampling to be used for data collection

and analysis will be drawn using Yaro Yamani (1968) formula for sampling determination (Kawachi & Berkman, 2014).

2.4 Instruments for Data Collection

Structured questionnaires on gender difference in political participation Owerri zone. Where the respondents should tick on Agreed or Disagreed in some question; and yes or No in other questions. Exploration of documentary data was also instruments used for gathering of data. The instruments were valid enough. This implies that the research was carried in Owerri zone respectively in regards to gender difference in political participation in Owerri zone. Such as the questionnaires and some documentaries would be examined by the supervisor. The instruments were also a reliable one as questionnaires and interviews were made in Owerri zone according to the selected target population in regards to gender difference in political participation in Owerri zone.

2.5 Method of Data Collection and analysis

The method for the collection of data for this research work study is grouped into primary and secondary data. Both are extensively used for the purpose of drawing an empirical conclusion on analysis of data so as to come up with fairly objective findings. It was acquired through the distribution of questionnaires designed for the people of Owerri zone, in addition to this, oral interviews were conducted chiefly to supplement the information derived from the questionnaires. This is to give respondents the opportunity to supply this information they may not give in a structured questionnaire. The principal sources of secondary data were textbooks on women and democratic governance. Some were collected from unpublished materials, archival materials, documents, journals, and from the internet. A simple frequency distribution table in presenting data and used statistical analysis and simple percentage (%) in analyzing the data collected was used.

3. Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, we analyze the research questions from the respondents. More so, four hundred (400) questionnaires were distributed, but only three hundred and ten (310) were returned. However, responses from respondents on the questionnaires and oral interviews are subsumed under the analysis of research questions.

Question 1: What Role Have Women Played in Development of Owerri Zone?

Table 3.1 Distribution on Ways Women have Contributed in the Development of Owerri Zone

S/No	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Child Socialization	60	19
2	Agriculture	80	26
3	Informal sector participation	50	16
4	Formal sector participation	40	13

5	Creation of political awareness	30	10
6	Contesting for equal opportunity with men	30	10
7	Holding public offices	20	6
Total		310	100

Source: Research Data (2021) (Frequency represents the respondents all through the tables)

In reference to table 3.1 above, a survey on women and development in Owerri zone revealed common consent that women have contributed in development of Owerri and that women can contribute more in development and politics. We also gathered that majority of the respondents (26%) made up of 80 respondents believed that women have contributed immensely in development of Owerri zone through agriculture, while 16% made up of 50 respondents believed women have contributed in development of Owerri zone through their involvement or participation in the informal sector of the economy. The survey indicates women engage more in the informal sector of the economy. Whereas 13% made 40 respondents said that women have contributed to the development through their participation in formal sector, 10% made up of 30 respondents believed that women have contributed in development of Owerri zone through creation of political awareness in women and contesting for equal opportunity with men respectively. Actually, women's role in development of Owerri zone cannot be overemphasized. It is against this backdrop that 6% representing 20 respondents agreed that women have contributed in development through holding public offices.

Research Question II: What Factors that Affects Women Participation in Politics in Owerri Zone?

Table 3.2: Distribution on Factors the Affects Women's Political Participation in Politics in Owerri zone.

S/No	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Patriarchy	140	45
2	Lower educational attainment for women	50	16
3	Lack of training and communication skill	40	13
4	Lack of money (economic resources)	20	7
5	Socialization difference of male and female	60	19
6.	Total	310	100

Source: Research Data (2021)

A range of five (5) options on the factors that affect women's participation in politics in Owerri zone was provided for the respondents. Just like in the first research question, where absolute greater percentage of the respondents identified with one option, a greater percentage also identified with one option here. Be that as it

may, it was gathered from the options in the distribution that the factors affecting women's participation in politics are myriad. According to table 4.2 above, women in Owerri zone are discriminated in political participation on the ground of gender. Explanations for gender difference in the political process abound. It was believed by more than 30% (precisely, 45%) of the respondents that patriarchy affects women's participation in politics. 16% believed that women's participation in politics is affected by lower educational attainment of women. 13% said that lack of training and communication skill affects women's participation in politics in Owerri zone and 7% believed that women's participation in politics in Owerri zone is affected by lack of economic resources such as fund, access to land, etc. while 19% made up of 60 respondents said that women's participation in politics in Owerri zone is affected by socialization difference of male and female. Women in Owerri zone and Imo state in particular often viewed mainstream politics as polluted - mired in corruption, hopeless divided class and ethnic interest and frequently criminalized.

Research Question III: In what Ways can Women be Encouraged to Participate fully in Politic?

Table 3.3 Distribution on Ways Women can be encouraged to participate fully in Politics

S/No	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Changing the negative perception of political women	40	14
2.	Family governance reform	50	16
3.	Education/training and development of women	30	10
4.	Political party and electoral system reforms	60	19
5.	Allowing women a voice in the budget	20	7
6.	Legal and constitutional reform	10	3
7.	All of the above	100	32
8.	Total	310	100

Source: Research Data (2021)

The above distribution is scattered among seven (7) groupings. In referring to table 4.3 above, a survey on ways women can be encouraged to participate fully in politics in Owerri zone, revealed a common consent that some reforms has to be made in the polity for women to fully in politics in Owerri zone. From the above table, 40 respondents representing 13% affirm that full participation of women in politics in could be encouraged by changing the negative perception of political women, 50, 30, and 60 respondents representing 16%, 10%, and 19% agreed that full participation of women in politics in Owerri zone could be encouraged through family governance reform, education/training and development of women and political party and electoral

systems reforms respectively. 20 respondents representing 7% said that this could be encouraged or ensured by allowing women voice in the budget. Respondents representing 3% said that, to encourage full participation of women in politics, there should be a reform of the constitutional and legal rights of women, the greatest percentage,(32%) made up of 100 respondents believed that a combination of the other options, that is, changing the negative perception of political women, reform of political party and electoral systems, allowing women a voice in the budget as well as legal and constitutional reforms will encourage full participation of women in politics in Owerri zone. The survey suggest that more enlightenment programmes need to be put in place to educate the society especially the men that political women are not wayward women.

4. Discussion of Findings

The economic and national development of any nation/state depends largely on full participation of all her eligible citizens (especially women) in politics. It is the duty of government, especially those concerned with 2nder and women affairs and development to ensure that women are fully integrated into the political process to avoid discrimination. From the responses of the people, one can see that there is a gender difference in politics in Imo state in general and Owerri zone in particular, most of the people, especially men still have negative perception of political women. And when that is the case, how can they be encouraged to be fully and actively involved in politics. Under this situation, the need to allow women a voice in the budget which is the major decision-making process can be identified. It is only when men change their negative perception of women in active politics that women can be adequately represented in politics so that they can find equal footing with men in the halls of power. Again, even though women have made much contribution in development, none of these contributions of women in development were recorded and where this is the case, the tendency is not only that they are not seen as good administrators but also relegated to the background as regards governance. Furthermore, patriarchy and low educational attainment is a cog on the wheels of women's participation in politics and is evident in the participation of women in politics in Imo state. This should be avoided by both government and women themselves in order to avoid underrepresentation/ low participation of women in politics or democratic apathy which women especially in Owerri are currently faced with. Also, family governance (where women are not allowed the right of inheritance and access to economic resources) should be amended or reformed so as to avoid lack of interest which has bedeviled active participation of women in politics. Finally, it was found out that apart from patriarchy and low educational attainment, women themselves contribute to their underrepresentation in politics. Most of the women leaders occupying political/leadership positions that gives them the opportunity to be involved in the formulation of policies in the state find it more comfortable working with their male counterpart as either their contemporaries or their personal aides in whatever capacity. They only reason advanced for this by most of them is that men are ever ready and prepared to undertake

any assignment given to them with little or no complaints or grudges, unlike their female counterparts.

5. Conclusion

The research work, which tried as much as possible to evaluate gender difference in political participation in Imo state and Owerri zone in particular, identified, while reviewing related literatures, that women have not been adequately or fully represented in politics or at the decision-making level of government. The body of research fed us with more related factors that are responsible for the under-representation of women in politics in Owerri zone. We, therefore, make some suggestions on how to tackle the problems and balance gender difference in political participation in Owerri zone in the next section. It is our humble request that these commended ways or strategies for greater involvement of women in politics should be followed to fully integrate women into mainstream politics and make government itself, efficient. We humbly agree, however, that many other ways more strategies for full participation and representation of women in politics could be excavated because (we admit that) our suggestions here are not exhaustive. But, be it as it may, they are remedial to the identified problems.

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