

## Factors Militating Against Women Active Participation in Politics in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This study investigated factors militating against women active participation in politics in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria. The study population consists of women of franchise age (18 years and above). A total of 550 women were selected from eleven wards using multi-stage cluster sampling approach. Data for the study were collected through triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods. Specifically questionnaire and oral interview were employed. Five hundred and fifty copies of questionnaire were administered, out of which only four hundred and fifty were suitable for analysis. The remaining were either lost/misplaced or improperly filled by the respondents. Oral interviews were conducted in the local dialects of the respondents and this was done to enhance the accuracy of the result. Data collected through questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive technique such as frequency counts and percentage, while the data obtained through interview were summarized and content analyzed. The study revealed factors such as inadequate financial resources, insufficient education and enlightenment as well as lack of clear policy by political parties for women political ambition as factors militating against women active participation in the study area. Based on the findings, the study concluded with a set of recommendations application of which will help to enhance women active political participation in the study area.

**Keywords:** Kogi state, Ofu, political participation, politics, women

### INTRODUCTION

Nigerian politics is predominantly a politics of men; men dominate the political arena, men formulate the rules of the political game and men define the standards for evaluation. Women are marginal in national politics and more generally in the public and private life of our nation. As early as the colonial era, the marginalization of women has been the standard practice in the Nigerian political system. Although there has been gradual improvement in women political participation in recent time, for instance, the proportion of seats held by women in the National parliament increased from 3.1% in 2000 to 7.5% in 2008. And after the 2007 election data from the National Centre for Women Development showed that there were 9 female senators compared to 4 in 2003. Also, there were 26 female members in the House of Representatives, compared to 23 in 2003. Between 2006 and 2009, 2 women were appointed to the supreme court bench, while female Deputy Governors increased from 2 in 2003 to 6 in 2007. Despite these, women are still not adequately represented considering their over 50% nation's population, National Population Commission, (NPC, 2006).

Data from the Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC) on the April 2007 elections show

the high levels of female Marginalization in Nigerian Politics. For example, of the 7160 candidates that contested in the April 2007 elections, only 628 were women; 25 candidates vied for the office of the President and only 1 was a woman, while 5 women contested for the office of the Vice President. Also, only 9 of the 109 senators were women, 25 of the 360 House of Representative members were women and there were only 54 female members of the state Assemblies. Looking at Nigeria's recent presidential election, Sarah Jubril was the only female amongst the three Presidential Candidates for the 2011 Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) Presidential election primary- the other two were President Goodluck Jonathan and former Vice President Atiku Abubakar.

As regard Kogi State, since its inception, it has been and still being ruled by men in both the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government. Similarly since the creation of Ofu Local Government Area on May 1989 by the military administration of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, both the executive and the legislative arms of the local government were dominated by men despite the fact that the women constituted half (50%) of the total population of the area and majority of these women are of franchise age (NPC, 2006). Today in Ofu Local Government Area,

women are seen as second class citizen or objects of desire. In short, at the moment Ofu Local Government Area is a man's local government area. These concerns motivated the study and the main issues, still unsolved are put in form of the following interrogating questions. First, what are the factors militating against women active participation in politics in the local government area? Second, do women have the knowledge of the political happening in Ofu local government area at all? And finally, what is the level of women participation in active politics in Ofu local government area? These questions will help to illuminate the grey areas of this study. The finding of this study will contribute to a better understanding of the factors affecting women participation in active politics in the study area as well as provide some ideas on ways of enhancing their active participation.

#### **Conceptual clarification:**

**Who is a woman?** The word woman can be used generally to mean any female human, or specifically, to mean an adult female as contrasted with girl (Wikipedia, 2012). The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary (1989) also defines a woman as an adult female person. Looking at the concept from Nigerian political arena, we can state that a woman is one who has attained the age of franchise and by Nigerian standard the minimum age is 18 years. According to Otite and Ogonwo (2006) women constitute about 50% of the Nigeria population and over 70% of them may be described as rural. They are mothers, wives and even workers. However, they argue that the perception of women is still culture-bound when related to men in matter of wealth, power and prestige under the prevailing patriarchal environment.

**Political participation:** This concept according to Odetola and Ademola (1985) deals with the level, nature and extent to which each citizen takes part or becomes involved in politics-power to take decisions, allocate resources and distribute them. The above implies that every qualified adult in a society is expected to participate directly or indirectly to influence political decisions that affect the individual and others. Simbine (2006) cited in George-Genyi (2010) sees political participation as those voluntary activities by which members of the society share in the selection of rulers and directly or indirectly in the formation of public policy. He thus opines that political participation is a civic right of all citizens. In considering its relevance to national development, George-Genyi (2010) describes political participation as the ability of an individual citizen to initiate and participate in legislative policies and laws that are germane to national development.

However, not everyone participates to the same degree in politics. That is there are different levels of

participation. Some seek and achieve the highest political office; some are active and are official members of political organizations, some are only generally interested in politics while some are totally apathetic and will not even vote (Odetola and Ademola, 1985). Citizen's participation in politics at every level can be taken as an index of the level of democracy and development in a country like Nigeria (George-Genyi, 2010). However, the absence or under representation of women in the very process of decision making and implementation undermines the fundamental concept of a democratic form of governance which assumes that participation and representation in all areas and levels of public life should be equally available to women and men (Aluko, 2011). The concept of women participation in politics would logically result from the synthesis of the essential political activities that women in Nigeria engage in such as:

- Attaining political power in legislative bodies
- Holding public and party office
- Attending political meetings and election rallies and campaigns
- Voting in an election
- Fielding self as a candidate to be elected
- Participation in political discussions and debates

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Several scholars such as Osinulu (2005), Aibieyi and Uhunmwuango (2008), Olufemi (2006), Schmidt (1987), Fisher (1997), Epelle and Oriakhi (2003) and Uhunmwuango (2011), etc., have written on factors affecting women active participation in politics. For instance, Olufemi (2006) traced one of the factors to the constitutional issues. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, according to him, continues to act as an impediment to women's active political ambitions as married women is often confronted with the problem of constituency, especially if she is married outside her locality or state of origin as she cannot claim the state of origin of her husband. This is often compounded by the discriminatory treatment she's likely to receive upon returning to her place of nativity.

Women's socio-economic condition is another factor identified by Fisher (1997). Women according to Fisher constitute the majority of the poor and the illiterate in both urban and rural areas in Africa and many young women between the ages of 15 and 25 have been pushed into sex work and face the risk of Hiv/Aids infection. The problem is exacerbated by the current trend towards institutionalizing money-politics as well as high registration and nomination fees. Although waivers are granted to women with regards to nomination fees, the absence of a ceiling on campaign expenditure, however, undermine the efficacy of such gesture (Uhunmwuango, 2011).

Similarly, Fadeyiye (2005) sees lack of constituents and financial resources as the major obstacles for women in taking active part in politics. Women, according to him move from their fathers' homes to their father-in-laws' homes. They are like refugees. They have no base from which to develop political contacts with the people or build knowledge and experience about the issue involve. Furthermore, according to Fadeyiye, women have no money of their, the money they have belongs to their father, their husbands or their in-laws and given the rising cost of running an effective campaign, this poses serious hurdle for women in the developing countries like Nigeria.

Epelle and Oriakhi (2003) identified lip services which political parties normally paid to women's political ambition as another factor affecting women active participation in politics. Several political parties, according to these scholars, lack a clear policy for women both in their manifesto and party's constitution and by extension makes women in Africa to continue to face enormous obstacles. Other scholars such as Izugbara and Onuoha (2003) and Gadant (2004), etc., also traced the systematic exclusion of women from political participation and governance in Nigeria to the colonial experience. Izugbara and Onuoha (2003) argue that it was during the period of colonization that the European's infected Nigeria with her overtly male-privileging political ideologies and value.

Despite the above constraints, the importance of women to the survival and political development of any nation cannot be over emphasized. For instance, former president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere cited in Uhummwuango (2011) attested to the need for women participation in politics, emancipation and community development as he pointed out that a person does not walk very fast on one leg. This point asserts the relevance of women in political participation. Also, in his effort to correct the prejudice against women, Apostle Paul in the Holy Bible (2009) asserts in Galatians 3:28 that there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Nigeria with over 140 Million people and with over fifty percent of female (NPC, 2006) cannot afford to lock out the females if they must compete technologically, scientifically and politically in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Uhummwuango, 2011).

#### **Theoretical framework:**

**Patriarchy theory:** The theory of patriarchy was advocated by scholars such as Millet (1969) and Beauvoir (1953), etc. The theorists of patriarchy laid emphasis on male dominant of the female folks. Males are seen as controlling access to institutional power and it is argued that they mould ideology, philosophy, art and religion to suit their needs. In the study of Millet (1969) in her book titled sexual politics, she wrote:

*Our society, like all other historical civilization is a patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, technology, universities, science, political office and finance-in short, every avenue of power.... Including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands.... What lingers of supernatural authority, the deity, his ministry, together with the ethics and values, the philosophy and art of our culture is of male manufacture.*

The above shows that the power of the male permeates everything, it is diffuse and concrete, symbolic and literal, universal and expressed with local variations which obscure its universality. Women are thought of as a sub- group in a man's world. Relating the theory to the issue under investigation, Nigerian society is a patriarchy one where men dominate everything, including the political arena. Women are marginalized in national and local politics and more generally in the public and private life of our nation despite their numerical strength (over 50%) in term of population (NPC, 2006). Women were confers with subordinate position relative to men's and are such they are expected to play second fiddle roles in the society (Anifowose, 2004; Agbalajobi, 2010; Arowolo and Aluko, 2010; Uhummwuango, 2011).

**Structural functionalist theory:** Functionalist's analysis has a long history in sociology. It is prominent in the study of August Comte 1798-1857 and Herbert Spencer 1820-1903. It was developed by Emile Durkheim 1858-1917 and refined by Talcott Parsons 1902-1979 (Rizer, 1992). This study utilized Talcott Parsons structural functionalism. Talcott Parsons used his AGIL (A-Adaptation, G-Goal attainment, I-Integration, L-Latency/pattern maintenance) scheme to relate to how the society functions together. It was this functional imperatives that promoted inter-dependence of various parts working harmoniously together to promote order and balance in the system. To this end, therefore, political participation should be everybody business irrespective of gender and not an exclusive function of men. Currently in Ofu Local Government Area, women have largely been left out of the political system. This marginalization contradicted the position of Talcott Parsons structural functionalism which welcomed everybody on board to ensure social order.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study was conducted in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria, in August, 2012. The Local Government was initially created by the administration of former President Shehu Shagari on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1980 but was scrapped by General Muhammed Buhari Administration in 1983. On May 11<sup>th</sup> 1989, the Military Administration of General

Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida re-created the local government with its headquarters in Ugwolawo. The study population consists of women who have reached franchise age. As regard selection of sample, multi-stage cluster sampling approach was adopted. The local government area was first stratified into wards. Eleven wards were identified through the discussion with the Chairman of the local government area. These wards are Aloji, Ochadamu, Itobe, Ejule/Alla, Ugwolawo I, Ugwolawo II, Ofabo, Iboko/Efakwu, Alloma, Igo and Ogbonicha. All the wards were purposively chosen for the study. As regards selection of building within the wards, simple random sampling technique was adopted. In each ward, the Primary Health Care (PHC) numbering on buildings were adopted and used as sampling frame for the study. The numbering on each building was re-written into small strips of paper and collected into bag and from the bag, numbers were picked and the corresponding building automatically became a sample. The picked paper is thrown back into the bag and shuffled before the next dip is made. Through this process, a total of 50 samples were drawn per ward.

At the building level, purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents. Those selected were women of franchise age (18 years and above). And at the end of the sampling exercise, a total of five hundred and fifty women were selected. Data for the study was collected through triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods. This became necessary because the issues raised in the objectives of the study demanded a different approach. The methods used were questionnaire and oral interview. Five hundred and fifty copies of questionnaire were administered out of which only four hundred and fifty were suitable for analysis. The remaining were either lost/misplaced or improperly filled by the respondents. Oral interview were conducted in the local dialects of the respondents. This was done to enhance the accuracy of the results. Data collected through questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive technique such as frequency counts and percentage, while the data obtained through interview were summarized and content analyzed. Both data were, however, used to provide a single report.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the social characteristics of the respondents. From the Table all (100.0%) the respondents are female. This is so because the study focuses on women and political participation in the study area, so men were not involved in this study. Marital status of the respondents shows that a little more than half (52.7%) are married, about 26.9% are single, 8.7% are separated from their partners, 6.6% have lost their partners to death (widowed) while 5.1%

Table 1: Social characteristics of the respondents (N450)

Variable	Categories	Frequency	(%)
Sex	Male	-	-
	Female	450	100.0
Current age (year)	18-22	49	10.9
	23-27	56	12.4
	28-32	53	11.8
	33-37	87	19.3
	38-42	79	17.6
	43-47	83	18.4
	48 and above	43	9.60
Marital status	Married	237	52.7
	Single	121	26.9
	Divorce	23	5.10
	Separated	39	8.70
	Widowed	30	6.60
Religious affiliation	Christianity	199	44.2
	Islam	220	48.9
	Traditional	28	6.20
	Others	03	0.70
Occupational status	Farming	101	22.4
	Trading	221	49.1
	Artisan	97	21.6
	Civil servant	19	4.20
	Others	12	2.70
Educational level	No formal education	67	14.9
	Primary	129	28.7
	Secondary	203	45.1
	Tertiary	51	11.3
	Others	-	-

Data from the field in Ofu LGA (2012)

are divorced. Respondents' religious affiliation shows that about 48.9% were Muslims. This was expected because Islam is the dominant faith in the study area. Respondents that are Christian constituted about 44.2% while 6.2% belong to various traditional religions. Occupational status of the respondents shows that about 49.1% are traders. They trade various wares within the study area. The occupations of other respondents are farming (22.4%), Artisan (21.6%), Civil Servant (4.2%) and those in other categories such as students, pensioners constituted 2.7%. The most encouraging aspect of the respondents' state of occupation is that the issue of unemployment is not prevalent among the women in the study area. Almost all the women reported being engaged in one form of income-generating activity be it farming, sewing, hair dressing or petty trading. Educational level of the respondents shows that about 45.1% had secondary school certificate, 28.7% had primary school certificate, 11.3% had tertiary educational certificate while 14.9% did not attend any educational institution. The implication of this finding is that many of the respondents are literate (even though majority of them did not go beyond secondary school level) and believe to have knowledge of the issue being researched into. Current age of the respondents shows that about 19.3% were between age 33-37 years, 18.4% were between ages 43-47 years, 17.6% were between ages 38-42 years while 12.4% were between ages 23-27 years. This finding indicates that all the respondents are within the franchise age (18 years). In Nigeria 18 years was stipulated in chapter

Table 2: Respondent's length of stay in ofu local government area

How long have you lived in Ofu LGA?	Frequency	(%)
Less than 6 months	29	6.40
6 months-1 year	43	9.60
1-2 years	64	14.2
3-4 years	71	15.8
5-6 years	104	23.1
7 years and above	139	30.9
Total	450	100.0

Data from the field in Ofu LGA (2012)

Table 3: Respondent's awareness and political participation distribution

Do you have knowledge of the political happening in your local government area?	Frequency	(%)
Yes	346	76.9
No	87	19.3
No response	17	3.80
Total	450	100.0
Do you participate in active politics in your local government area?		
Yes	84	18.7
No	353	78.4
No response	13	2.90
Total	450	100.0

Data from the field in Ofu LGA (2012)

4 of the 1999 constitution as the age at which one can vote and be voted for.

Table 2 revealed the respondents' length of stay in the study area. From the table, about 30.9% have been staying in the study area since seven years ago, 23.1% have spent between 5-6 years in the study area, 15.8% spent 3-4 years, 14.2% spent between 1-2 years 9.6% spent between 6 months-1 year while only 6.4% of the respondent have not spent up to 6 months in the study area. This finding indicate that majority of the respondents have stayed longer in the study area and with this they are expected to have had adequate knowledge of the political situation of the area of study.

Table 3 shows respondents awareness and political participation distribution. From the table, majority (76.9%) had knowledge of the political happening in Ofu Local Government Area; about 19.3% had no knowledge of the political situation of the area while the remaining 3.8% did not respond. Table 3 further revealed that majority (78.4%) of the respondents were not participating actively in the politics of the study area, while only 18.7% of the total number of respondents were actively involved in the politics of the Ofu local government area and the remaining (2.9%) did not respond to the question posed by the researchers as regards their participation in the politics of the study area. Those who claimed to have participated in active politics were further interviewed to know the level of their participation. Some said they have once been the councilor of their ward while others claimed to have either been the secretary of their party or had held other party executive position in the recent past.

Table 4: Respondents reasons for non-participation in active politics in Ofu local government area

Reasons given by the respondents	Frequency	(%)
Lack of financial resources to prosecute political ambition	93	20.7
Insufficient education and enlightenment on the politics of the study area	60	13.3
Political parties lack of clear policy for women political ambition	55	12.2
Cultural factors i.e., women are often over burden with household chore, etc.	81	18.0
Lack of adequate recognition for women in position of authority	76	16.9
No response	85	18.9
Total	450	100.0

Data from the field in Ofu LGA (2012)

Table 4 revealed some of the reasons given by the respondents for not participating actively in the politics of the study area. The reasons mentioned by the respondents were lack of financial resources to prosecute political ambition (20.7%), insufficient education and enlightenment on the politics of the study area (13.3%), lack of clear policy on the part of political parties for women political ambition (12.2%). Others were household chores which often overwhelm the women in the study area (18.0%), lack of adequate recognition for women in position of authority (16.9%) while about 18.9% of the respondent did not state any reason or respond. The result of the in-depth interview conformed to those reasons listed above and more reasons were further given by the interviewers. These reasons include lack of permission by the husband and religious factors especially as regard Muslim women in Purdah. According to one of the interviewee:

*In Nigeria society men/husband dominates and is regarded as head of family. We the women/wives are expected to seek permission from our husband before embarking on any venture/enterprise. And in a situation where such permission is not granted, the interviewee continued, we have no other option than to drop whatever ambition we have be it political or others.*

The above shows the confirmation of the views of the patriarchy theorists. As regards religious factor especially with respect to the Muslim women in Purdah, One of the interviewers who happened to be a Muslim said *those women in Purdah are not expected to go out any how and at all-time not to talk of participating in active politics.* This factor is a reflection of the former one (Patriarchal factor) because it is men that often (most especially the Muslim one) put their wives in Purdah (in the name of religion) to restrict their movement and thus preventing them from moving around anyhow and at all time and this stop them from participating in active politics. All these were being done to ensure men absolute domination of women in society. By and large, this finding confirm to

that of Osinulu (2005), Olufemi (2006), Fadeiye (2005) and Epelle and Oriaku (2003). These scholars in their various studies found out factors such as women socio-economic condition, (Olufemi, 2006), lip services which political parties often pay to women's political ambition (Epelle and Oriaku, 2003) etc., as factors affecting women active participation in politics in Nigeria. However, other factors such as patriarchal and religious factors discovered in this study were not mentioned by any of those scholars.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined women and political participation in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State. The finding revealed that fewer numbers of women (18.7%) were involving in active politics in the study area while the majority (78.4%) was not participating in active politics. Their non-participation according to finding was due to factors such as lack of financial resources on the part of women to prosecute their political ambition, insufficient education and enlightenment on the politics of the study area, lack of clear policy on the part of political parties for women political ambition, lack of adequate recognition for women position of authorities. Based on this, in order to enhance women active political participation the followings are hereby recommended:

- Political parties should have a clear policy in respect of women political ambition. This will help women to know what to do and how to go about their political venture.
- To be religious is a good thing but putting women in Purdah and restricting their movement as well as activities which stop them from political participation is a form of slavery. So therefore men should allow their wives to actively participate in politics which is one of their fundamental human rights enshrined in chapter 4 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended).
- Accomplished politicians as well as political parties operating in the study area should always assist women financially and morally to prosecute their political ambition.
- Women in the study area should be enlightened by the official of the National orientation agency as well as through sustained publicity by political parties so as to increase their political awareness.

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