

Women and Political Participation in Nigeria

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Abstract

The low level of political participation of women is becoming alarming and disturbing. This hampers women from contributing their quota to the development of Nigeria. Empirical observations have shown that women in position of responsibilities are noted to be hardworking and firm in their decision. The aim of the study, therefore, was to find out the specific factors responsible for the low level of political participation of women. In achieving this, the study generated both primary and secondary data. 300 questionnaires were administered on the ratio 50:50 basis for both men and women. The study discovered that the major inhibiting factors were sedentary in nature rather than the issue of money politics, violence, thuggery, etc which were considered by women respondents as secondary.

Keywords: Distribution, Influence, Observations, Participation, Politics, Power, Resources, Women.

Introduction

The essence of political participation in any society, either civilised or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and dispensing power to organise society, harness and distribute resources and to influence decision making in line with organised or individual interests (Arowolo and Abe, 2008:13-14).

All groups (including those of women) seek to influence the dispensation of power in line with their articulated interests as a fundamental motive of political participation. Women, in their gradual consciousness of state of mind also, in recent times, increasingly seek power equation and distribution and redistribution of resources in their favour. Although, careful observations have indicated that the involvement of women in Nigerian politics is largely noticeable at the level of voting and latent support, Adeniyi (2003:353) has identified violence and other forms of electoral conflicts perpetrated and perpetuated by men and male youths as the major barriers confronting and inhibiting women active participation in Nigerian politics

Arguments are on the increase on the specific role women should play in the society. Opinions are divided on whether the role of women is predominantly in the home fronts or women can also engage in other socio-economic and political activities like their male counterparts. It is, however, believed that while the natural relationship between mother and her child may compel and confine her to sedentary activities, it is also important that such mother should contribute her quota to the development of her family and that of her society at large. The focus of this paper is the aspect of participation of women in societal activities that relate primarily to politics.

Political participation, as one of the tenets of democracy, is found to be liberal and unrestrictive. Subscribing to this, Okolie (2004:53) perceives political participation as “freedom of expression, association, right to free flow of communication, right to influence decision process and the right to social justice, health services, better working condition and opportunity for franchise”. Political participation is one of the key ingredients of democracy in its real sense. Taking the conceptualisation of democracy by Larry Diamond (1989: xvi) into cognisance, democracy provides the equal opportunity platform for political participation and fairness in such competition, thus:

a system of government that meets three essential conditions: meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and groups, especially political parties, for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through regular and fair election, such that no major (adult) social group is excluded; and a level of civil and political liberties, freedom to form and join organizations sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation.

In a similar perspective, Onyeoziri (1989:6) conceptualises four indicative domains of democracy which include: “the domain of individual and group rights and freedoms; the domain of popular and equal participation in collective decision; the domain of accountability of government to mass publics and constituent minorities; and the domain of the application of the principles of equal citizenship in all spheres of life- social, economic and political.

The running theme of these definitions is that any claim to democratic regime or state must essentially embrace a high degree of competitive choice, openness, enjoyment of civil and political liberties and popular participation that embraces all groups of the society, one that is not segregationist or discriminatory. The conceptual underpinnings of the definitions are freedom and equal opportunity for political participation that democracy avails both men and women. If democracy does not ordinarily discriminate on the grounds of race, religion or sex, then restrictions experienced in Africa, nay, Nigeria suggests a level of artificiality and man-made imposition.

Twentieth century industrial capitalism, however, ushered in secularisation of politics and the legitimisation of universal civil rights (Nda, 2003:329). Women began to form themselves into groups in consciousness of the wave and potency of globalisation and industrial capitalism that inevitably moved towards loosening the socio-economic and political shackles of women and attempted to hasten the pace and tempo of institutionalisation of equal rights for all. Women now, to varying degrees depending on the levels of modernisation and technological development in different societies, participate in education, economic activities and the political processes with little or no formalised hindrance.

On the basis of the above, the paper is predicated on the following assumptions:

1. That the low level of political participation of women in Nigeria is a function of the biological affinity and natural bond between a woman and her child such that women deliberately restrict themselves to domestic activities in order to oversee welfare of their children and coordinate their home affairs;
2. That flowing from above, husbands/fathers capitalise on this sedentary acceptance of domestic responsibilities by women/wives to further restrict and confine women to home fronts and assume the role of bread winner in most cases in rural areas, a position that clearly defines the dominant role of men in the families;

For the purpose of explicit analysis, the paper is divided into five parts. Part one consists of introduction, part two focuses on the factors that mitigate and militate against women in politics. Part three dwells on women and political participation in Nigeria. Part four comprises data analysis and presentation. Part five concludes the study.

Factors Militating Against Active Women Participation in Nigerian Politics

Observation and empirical evidence point to and reveal that a number of factors have facilitated or contributed to the second fiddle role women are playing in political activities in Nigeria. Some of these factors are identified as a function of natural status of women, while others are man-made deliberately designed by their male counterparts to further confine women to sedentary activities. These factors include, but not limited to, the following:

Cultural Practices

A number of barriers are imposed on women active participation in politics by cultural practices. Nigerian society is permeated by patriarchy whereby women are expected to conform to and confine themselves to male dominance and female subservience. Women are seen to belong to the home, be incapable of making sound decisions and it is unbecoming of women to expose themselves in public for political activities such as campaign rallies. Men often find it incredible and impracticable to see their participating in politics. (Iloh and Ikenna, 2009:124; Nda, 2003: 336).

Violence, Thuggery and Intimidation

Other impediments preventing women from actively participating in politics and governance are: patriarchal dominance in political parties, godfatherism, indigeneship, intra-party rigging, political violence, thuggery and high level of intimidation (INEC, 2006:5).

Nature of Political Party Formation

At the level of political party formation, it is usually in form of club and informal meetings initiated by male friends and business partners. Other members of the society, including women, are contacted for membership at a much later stage when party structures are already put in place. So, women are naturally excluded from the formation stage of political parties thus denying them of benefits accruing to foundation membership.

Inadequacy of Willing and Educated Women

Some women in Nigeria naturally subject themselves to domestic activities and the need to prevent broken homes. This inevitably reduces the number of qualified and willing women for both appointive and elective positions.

High Cost of Election

Although this equally affects men but the rate at which it affects women is more pronounced in Nigeria. The high cost of financing political parties and campaigns is a big obstacle to women. The minimum cost of gubernatorial election could go as high as 200 million naira. How many women can mobilise such huge amount of money and how many men can mobilise such amount of money for women? Which political party would nominate a woman for that post considering her very small contribution to party finance and formation? (Nda, 2003:338).

The Issue of Indigeneity

This is another major barrier that militates against active women participation in politics. Women who are married outside their constituencies of birth (but who contest elections in their marriage constituencies) are usually regarded as non-indigenes by the people from that constituency (at least by birth). This is a worse case if the woman is married from entirely different ethnic group. Such a woman will be regarded as being over ambitious and may be prevented or discouraged.

Women and Political Participation in Nigeria

The major thrust of this paper is to look at the level of political participation of Nigerian women in politics and the form of hindrances, if there is any, that prevent them from actively participating in politics, using available data as well as primary source of data generation. Comparatively, the rate at which men participate in politics is incredibly higher than their female counterparts. This is not to say, however, that there has not been a progressive increase in the trend of women participation in politics in terms of appointments and elections, but the participation is considered low considering the international standard of 30% benchmark.

In 1992 for instance, under the Babangida's administration, out of 300 gubernatorial aspirants, only 8 were women representing 2.6% and none of these women was elected as governor (Iloh and Ikenna, 2009:117). Research has shown that exclusion of women in the party executives contributes in no small measure to the marginalisation of women in politics, especially during party nominations (Ako-Nai, 2005:491; Muhammed, 2006:51; Okoosi-Simbine, 2006:153; Illoh and Ikenna, 2009:117).

For the past 27 years, election of women into the National Assembly has not gone beyond 8.3%. Table 1 clearly shows that of 56 contestable seats in the Senate, only one woman was elected and 3 out of 442 were women in the House of Representatives. The story was the same in 1992 in the Senate where only one woman emerged as Senator out of 90 and 14 out of 575 in the House of Representatives.

It was also revealed, in table 2, that in the year 1999, out of 978 contestable seats in the 36 Houses of Assembly, men occupied 966 leaving 12 seats for women representing 1.2%. There was upward movement in 2003 where women occupied 39 out of 951 seats representing 4%. In 2007, women occupied 54 seats out of total of 990 with the percentage of 5.5. In the House of Representatives, in the year 1999, out of total 360 seats, women occupied 13 representing 3.6%. In 2003, men occupied 318 out of 339 leaving 21 seats for women of 3.6%. The number was increased in 2007 with women occupying a total of 25 seats representing 7%.

The story was the same in the Senate, where in 1999; women occupied 3 seats out of a total of 109 representing 2.8%. In 2003, men occupied 105 out of 109 seats leaving 4 for women representing 3.7%. There was an increase in 2007 as women occupied 9 seats out of 109 representing 8.3%

Table 1: Women in the Nigerian National Assembly (1980-1992)

	Women	Men	% of Women	% of Men
Senate	1	56	1.8	98.2
House of Reps	3	442	0.7	99.3
1992				
	Women	Men	% of Women	% of Men
Senate	1	90	1.0	99
House of Reps	14	575	2.4	97.6

Source: The Nigeria CEDAW NGO Coalition Shadow Report (2008), New York, United Nations Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women

Table 2: women in the State Houses of Assembly and National Assembly (1999-2007)

Houses of Assembly	Total No of Seats	Men	Women	Percentage of Men	Percentage of Women
1999	978	966	12	98.8%	1.2%
2003	951	912	39	96%	4%
2007	990	936	54	94.5%	5.5%

House of Representatives	Total No of Seats	Men	Women	Percentage of Men	Percentage of Women
1999	360	347	13	96.4%	3.6%
2003	339	318	21	94%	6%
2007	358	333	25	93%	7%

Senate	Total No of Seats	Men	Women	Percentage of Men	Percentage of Women
1999	109	106	3	97.2%	2.8%
2003	109	105	4	96.3%	3.7%
2007	109	100	9	91.7%	8.3%

Source: The Nigeria CEDAW NGO Coalition Shadow Report (2008), New York, United Nations Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women

Table 3 indicates that out of the 774 local government chairmen elected in 1999 only 8 are women representing 1%. There was a progressive increase in the number of appointive positions occupied by women from 1999 to date and is still likely to increase in future, but the fact remains that the degree of improvement remains marginal. (Aiyede, 2006:172). Prior to 1999, women representation in the Federal Executive Council never exceeded 5% (Nda, 2003:334; Iloh and Ikenna, 2009:117). In 1999-2003, the Obasanjo government made a clear departure and appointed 4 women out of the 29 senior ministers representing 13.7% and 3 out of the 18 junior ministers representing 16.6%. There are 2 women advisors and 2 senior special assistants and 6 special assistants and 1 special assistant to the Vice President. 8 permanent secretaries are women (see Tables 4 and 5) .

Table 3: Statistics of Local Government Chairmen in the Fourth Republic

S/N	State	Male	Female
1.	Abia	17	0
2.	Adamawa	20	0
3.	Akwa-Ibom	31	0
4.	Anambra	20	1
5.	Bauchi	20	0
6.	Bayelsa	8	0
7.	Benue	22	1
8.	Borno	27	0
9.	Cross Rivers	18	0
10.	Delta	25	0
11.	Ebonyi	13	0
12.	Edo	18	0
13.	Ekiti	16	0
14.	Enugu	17	0
15.	FCT	5	1
16.	Gombe	11	0
17.	Imo	26	1
18.	Jigawa	27	0
19.	Kaduna	22	1
20.	Kano	44	0
21.	Katsina	33	1
22.	Kebbi	21	0
23.	Kogi	21	0
24.	Kwara	16	0
25.	Lagos	20	0
26.	Nasarawa	12	0
27.	Niger	25	0
28.	Ogun	20	0
29.	Ondo	18	0
30.	Osun	29	1

31.	Oyo	33	0
32.	Plateau	16	1
33.	Rivers	23	0
34.	Sokoto	33	0
35.	Taraba	16	0
36.	Yobe	17	0
37.	Zamfara	14	0
	Total	774	8

Source: Nda (2003) Women in the Power Equation of Nigerian Politics. Lagos: Dat and Partners Logistics Ltd

Table 4: Gender Statistics on State Governors and Deputy Governors in the Fourth Republic

S/N	State	Gover	Nor	Deputy	Governor
		Male	Female	Male	Female
1.	Abia	1	0	1	0
2.	Adamawa	1	0	1	0
3.	Akwa-Ibom	1	0	1	0
4.	Anambra	1	0	1	0
5.	Bauchi	1	0	1	0
6.	Bayelsa	1	0	1	0
7.	Benue	1	0	1	0
8.	Borno	1	0	1	0
9.	Cross Rivers	1	0	1	0
10.	Delta	1	0	1	0
11.	Ebonyi	1	0	1	0
12.	Edo	1	0	1	0
13.	Ekiti	1	0	1	0
14.	Enugu	1	0	1	0
15.	FCT	1	0	1	0
16.	Gombe	1	0	1	0
17.	Imo	1	0	1	0
18.	Jigawa	1	0	1	0
19.	Kaduna	1	0	1	0
20.	Kano	1	0	1	0
21.	Katsina	1	0	1	0
22.	Kebbi	1	0	1	0
23.	Kogi	1	0	1	0
24.	Kwara	1	0	1	0
25.	Lagos	1	0	0	1
26.	Nasarawa	1	0	1	0
27.	Niger	1	0	1	0
28.	Ogun	1	0	1	0
29.	Ondo	1	0	1	0
30.	Osun	1	0	1	0
31.	Oyo	1	0	1	0
32.	Plateau	1	0	1	0
33.	Rivers	1	0	1	0
34.	Sokoto	1	0	1	0
35.	Taraba	1	0	1	0
36.	Yobe	1	0	1	0
37.	Zamfara	1	0	1	0
	Total	36	0	35	1

Source: Nda (2003) Women in the Power Equation of Nigerian Politics. Lagos: Dat and Partners Logistics Ltd.

Table 5: Gender Statistics of Fourth Republic Presidency

S/N	Office	Male	Female
1.	President	1	0
2.	Vice President	1	0
3.	Senior Ministers	25	4
4.	Junior Ministers	15	3
5.	Head of Service	1	0
6.	Secretary to Govt of the Federation	1	0
7.	Chief of Staff to the President	1	0
8.	Special Advisers	14	2
9.	Deputy Chief of Staff	1	0
10.	Permanent Secretaries	40	8
11.	Directors Generals	3	0
12.	Senior Special Assistants	11	2
13.	Chief of Protocol	1	0
14.	Deputy Chief of Staff to the Vice President	1	0
15.	Deputy Chief Press Secretary to the VP	1	0
16.	Personal Assistant to the President	1	0
17.	Principal Secretary to the President	1	0
18.	Special Assistants to the President	20	6
19.	Special Assistants to the Vice President	4	1
20.	Accountant-General of the Federation	1	0
21.	Auditor-General of the Federation	1	0
	Total	145	26

Source: Nda (2003) Women in the Power Equation of Nigerian Politics. Lagos: Dat and Partners Logistics Ltd.

Despite the argument that political participation of women in Nigeria rose in 2003 and 2007, it is, however, restricted maximally to the appointive positions as none of the women who contested governorship election got elected. This is clearly indicated in table 6. Also, the few that contested did so under unpopular parties as major political parties discriminated against the candidacy of women. For example, the Alliance for Democracy (AD) was active in 1999 and 2003 only in the South-West and not in Akwa-Ibom and Kogi states (South-South) and North-Central) respectively. The All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) was only very active in eastern part of the country and not in Ekiti state. The United Nigeria Peoples Party (UNPP), New Nigerian Peoples Party (NNPP) and National Conscience Party (NCP) did not command any strong followership in any part of the country in 2003 and 2007. However, Ekiti, Ogun, Osun and later Anambra states produced female Deputy-Governors. As has been earlier indicated, no woman won any governorship seat in the period under review in any of the 36 states. Table 7 shows the list of female Deputy Governors elected in the 2007 General Elections

Table 6: List of Female Contestants in the 2003 Governorship Election

S/N	State	Name	Party
1.	Akwa-Ibom	Maria Nyong Ikpe	AD
2.	Delta	Agbajo, O.T.	NNPP
3.	Ekiti	Remi Okebunmi	APGA
4.	Enugu	Lorreta Aniagolu	NCP
5.	Kogi	Love L. Emma	AD
6.	Lagos	Koforola Bucknor-Akerele	UNPP
7.	Osun	Aluko Folashade	NNPP

Source: Adapted from INEC (2003, Vol. 11: 16)

Table 7: List of Female Deputy Governors Elected in 2007

S/N	State	Name	Party
1.	Anambra	Mrs. Stella Odife	PDP
2.	Imo	Lady Dr. Ada Okwuonu	PPA
3.	Lagos	Mrs. Sarah Bisi Sosan	AC
4.	Ogun	Alhaja Salmot M. Badru	PDP
5.	Plateau	Mrs. Pauline K. Tallen	PDP
6.	Osun	Erelu Olushola Obada	PDP

Source: Adapted from INEC (2007)

Following the Supreme Court judgement on 14th June, 2007 which declared that Peter Obi, elected on the platform of APGA, has not finished his tenure, Andy Uba, whose Deputy Governor was Stella Odife, was removed from office as Governor of Anambra State through the court's verdict. Peter Obi's Deputy, Mrs Virgie Etiaba, was also a woman, and retained a female Deputy-Governorship (Iloh and Ikenna, 2009:117).

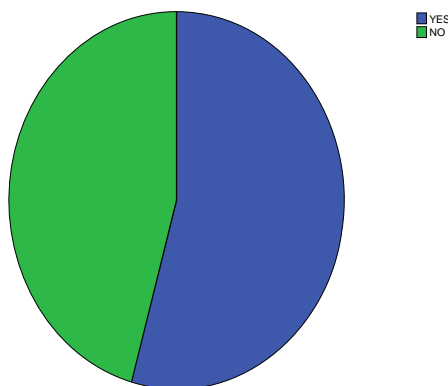
By and large, women are gradually being conscientised and mobilised into participating in politics, the move that has increased their participation in politics. It is still believed that efforts should still be channelled towards awakening women into productive and active participation in politics in order to realise the full productive capacity of Nigerian preponderant population. This becomes imperative as "irresistible role of women is capable of building strong democratic institutions that are acceptable and durable" (Adedeji, 2009:1).

Data Presentation and Analysis

Do you believe in women participation in politics?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	163	54.3	54.3	54.3
	NO	137	45.7	45.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

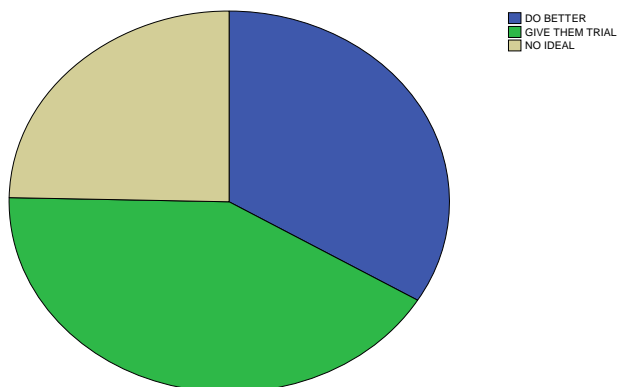
Do you believe in Women Participation in Politics?



Reason for women participation in politics

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	THEY DO BETTER	101	33.7	33.7	33.7
	GIVE THEM TRIAL	125	41.7	41.7	75.3
	NO IDEA	74	24.7	24.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

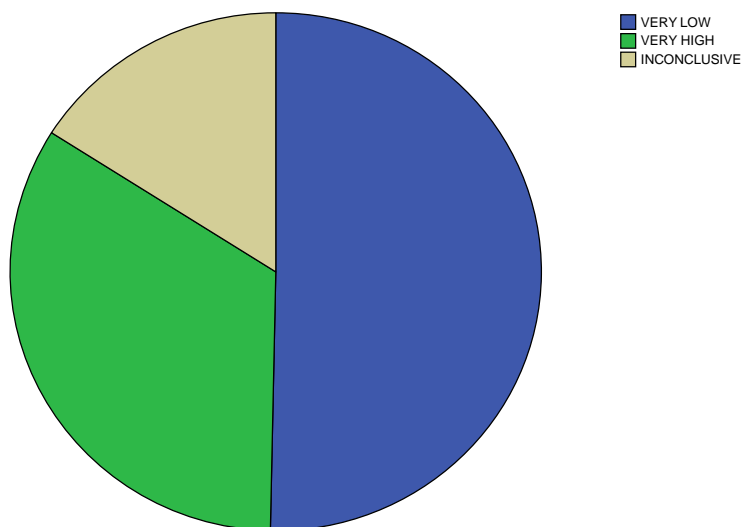
Reasons for believing in women participation in politics



Does participation of women in politics have any advantages?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	VERY LOW	151	50.3	50.3	50.3
	VERY HIGH	101	33.7	33.7	84.0
	INCONCLUSIVE	48	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

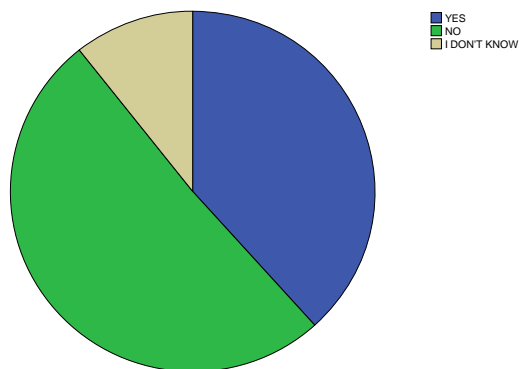
Advantages of women in politics



Does participation of women in politics have any negative consequences society?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	115	38.3	38.3	38.3
	NO	153	51.0	51.0	89.3
	I DON'T KNOW	32	10.7	10.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

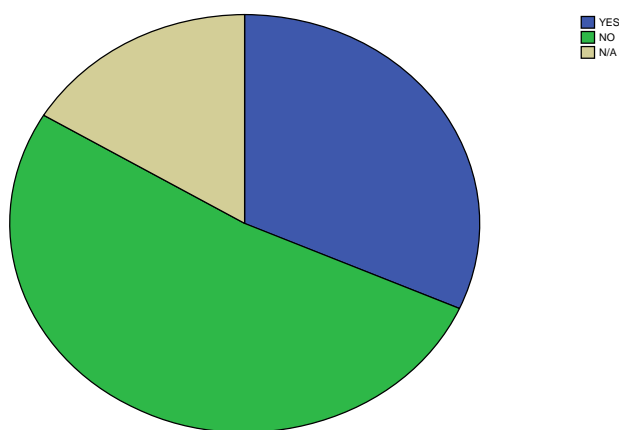
Consequences of women participation in Politics



Can you allow your wife to participate in politics?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	95	31.7	31.7	31.7
	NO	156	52.0	52.0	83.7
	N/A	49	16.3	16.3	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

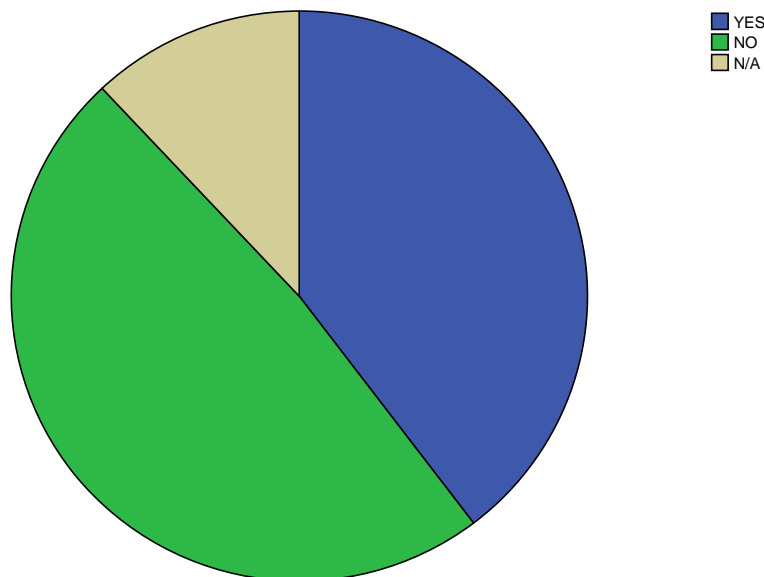
Can you allow your wife to participate in politics?



Can your husband allow you to participate in politics?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	119	39.7	39.7	39.7
	NO	145	48.3	48.3	88.0
	N/A	36	12.0	12.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

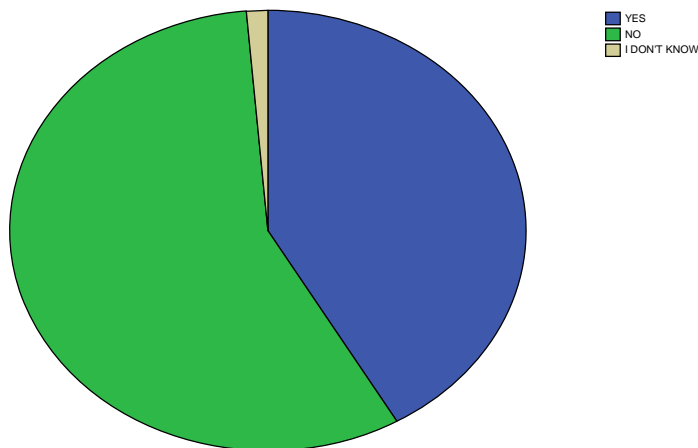
Can your husband allow you to participate in politics?



Do women have embargo/hindrane from participating in politics?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	125	41.7	41.7	41.7
	NO	171	57.0	57.0	98.7
	I DON'T KNOW	4	1.3	1.3	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Do women have embargo/hindrane from participating in politics?



Interpretation

In all, 300 questionnaires were administered, 150 each for men and women. All of the respondents were educated to the minimum level of SSCE and maximum of MSc. 163 respondents representing 54.3% believed in women participation in politics, while 137 representing 45.7% were of the opinion that women should not participate in politics. 101 out of 300 respondents representing 50.3% believed that women can do better if actually given the opportunity to participate in politics. 151 respondents

representing 50.3% were of the opinion that women participation in politics is advantageous. Out of 300 respondents, 115 representing 38.3% were of the opinion that women participation in politics has negative consequences on the society.

A total of 156 respondents representing 52.0% could never allow their wives to participate in politics. 145 representing 48.3% accepted that their husbands can not allow them to go into politics, 36 respondents representing 12% were indifferent to the question while 119 representing 39.7% could actually allow their wives to go into politics. A total of 125 representing 41.7 believed that women have certain form of embargo/hindrance from participating in politics, while 171 representing 57.0% were of the opinion that women have no formal embargo from participating in politics and 4 respondents representing 1.3% were indifferent.

Conclusion

Viewed from the perspective of culture and tradition, women actually face massive resistance from participating in politics. Aside the fact that majority of husbands do not allow their wives to participate in politics, the study discovered that a lot of female respondents believed that politics would prevent them from taking absolute care of their families. Fear of broken homes, breeding irresponsible children and the need to perform their domestic activities were identified as major reasons preventing them from going into politics. The issue of violence, thuggery, intimidation and money politics are considered secondary. The first major issue is lack of interest arising from the need to effectively handle their sedentary activities.

In order to ensure active participation of women in politics, civil society organisations, governments as well as political parties should increase the level of awareness of women by organising seminars/workshops not only in the cities but also in the villages. Attendance to such seminars/workshops should be open to both women and men. Men need to be orientated about the need to allow their wives to participate in politics. This is necessary as most of the male respondents are of the opinion that women prostitutes are in politics and that any women in politics are irresponsible house wives. In addition, governments at all levels should encourage girl child education. It can be made compulsory that all female children of school age should go to school free of charge. This will give them equal opportunity with their male counterparts.

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