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Religion and Governance in Nigeria: The Muslim Woman and Politics of Sokoto State

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Abstract

Participation of women in governance in Nigeria has continued to generate discussions among religious groups particularly since the return to democratic rule in 1999. Muslim scholars have varying opinions concerning the active role a woman should play in governance like her counterpart male citizen. Thus, creating a dilemma on the responsibility of Muslim woman in establishing a just system in which law of Allah will be supreme, democratic ideals of equal and universal suffrage would take place and where both sexes would enjoy the dividends of good governance. Therefore, the paper examines the role of Muslim women in Nigeria's democratic governance, investigates position of Islam with regards to women political participation and examines the challenges, nature and factors that facilitate participation of women in politics of Sokoto State. It also aimed at suggesting constructive strategies and areas that guide women's participation in politics in Sokoto State. Interviews and questionnaire conducted in nine sampled Local Governments out of the entire twenty-three local governments of the State showed significant apathetic and inactive participation of women in the democratic processes and governance of Sokoto State. The paper establishes that contrary to the democratic ideals and Islamic legal provisions, some socio-cultural factors such as poverty, political illiteracy and misinterpretation of Islamic provisions on political participation of women determined substantially the low level of participation of women in politics of Sokoto State. The paper, therefore, recommends that intensive and rational political education should be launched for the positive participation of women in politics that ensures inclusiveness and promotion of good governance in Nigeria.

Key Words: Islam, Participation, Politics, Religion, Suffrage and Woman.

Introduction

Nigeria, a colonial construct, has since its independence inherited structures and functions that limited role of women in political governance. Mba (1982) noted general negative effects of colonization on women's position and the lack of representation to the governance of civil society whereby women had been rendered invisible to the exclusively male counterpart. Some of these policies covered areas of taxation, education, suffrage and representation. In recent times, the participatory grievances relating to representation and suffrage have resulted into numerous socio-political problems and disconnects of women in the governance of the country. These

series of problems and disconnects that relate to inappropriate political participation of women could be attributed to low education, weak human and cultural values.

In essence, political participation involves voluntary engagement in the political process, which can be from individual, group, political parties, networks or civil society organisations. It also entails government instituting an inclusive approach in developing and implementing state's policies. The quality, relevance and effectiveness of government policies depend largely on ensuring participation of all citizens of both sexes throughout the policy chain - from conception to implementation (Wali, 2010) within the polity. On the other hand, politics, in Islamic perspective, is the collective religious responsibility of both men and women. Muslims, as a group, must conduct their political activities in keeping with the teaching of Islam. Each individual, either man or women is also required by the religion to do his/her utmost best to advance the course of Islam through his/her political participation.

Nigeria is a multi-religious country where Muslims and Christians have to co-exist and pursue opportunities offered him by the system in all spheres of public life. However, in Sokoto State, many of the women groups have been placed in discriminatory and servitude position due to some cultural reasons. The women are used by the political class for multiplicity of votes and other practices for their selfish political pursuit. The main issue is that policy makers are not taking account of the impact of policies on various groups within the polity to ensure constructive inclusiveness of women which will ensure good governance and well-being of the entire society. It is against this background that the paper examines the role of women in Nigeria's democratic governance; investigates position of Islam with regards to women political participation and examines the challenges, nature and factors that facilitate participation of women in politics of Sokoto State. Finally the paper suggests constructive strategies and areas that guide women's participation in politics in Sokoto State.

Methodology

The paper used both primary and secondary sources of data collection. For the primary sources, questionnaire and interview were adopted as instruments for retrieving information from women groups, political parties and religious or opinion leaders. The paper adopted simple random sampling to select nine local governments out of the entire twenty-three local governments of Sokoto State. In the sampling, three local governments were selected, each from the three senatorial districts of the state; the sampled local governments are Kebbe, Shagari and Dange/Shuni local governments (from Sokoto West Senatorial district), Sokoto North, Binji and Wurno (from central district) and Goronyo, Isa and Rabah (from the Eastern district). Practically, a total number of twenty-seven (27) individuals from political party, religious or traditional and women leaders were randomly selected and interviewed. That is to say, one chairman of a political party, one religious or traditional leader, and one women leader of a political party making a total of three individuals each from the sampled local governments. For questionnaire, seven hundred and forty-six

(746) only were retrieved out of the total number of nine hundred (900) questionnaires distributed – one hundred (100) each for the nine sampled local governments. Additionally, in the process of data collection, various textbooks, journal, Newspaper and some government's publications were consulted as secondary sources.

In the analysis of data, both the qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted. The qualitative method entails the description of the content obtained from textbook, journals and other publications in reviewing and determining the nature of political participation of women in Nigeria and in Islam. Equally, the use of quantitative analysis was necessary for the descriptive statistical analysis using frequencies and percentages for presenting the nature, factors and challenges of women's participation in politics of Sokoto State.

Conceptual and Theoretical Explanations

In politics, certain basic concepts and theoretical bases are needed in the explanation of methods and procedures that states adopt to achieve stable and inclusive political environment. In democratic politics, a stable political environment is usually achieved by individuals and groups through the effective appreciation of these core concepts of politics such as participation, suffrage, representation as well as political culture and orientation. In particular, concepts of political participation and Suffrage have been seen to be relevant conceptual framework, for this paper, in the analysis of religion and politics in Nigeria. For instance, voting is at the heart of any modern participation in politics. The right to vote is simply known as suffrage. The critical problem of analysis here is about the right or eligibility to vote. In most countries, adult citizen – both male and female - are the eligible voters. This expresses what is popularly known as universal adult suffrage. Therefore, the paper used the concept of suffrage as it relates to women's participation in politics in Nigeria including the explanations for the constitutional qualifications of the participants.

According to Ayeni and Akeke (2008), the idea of political participation was first developed in ancient Greek in the 5th Century B.C, where the adult male citizens met together in an assembly, discussed and debated issues in policy and law enactment. This ancient effort of participation demonstrates a classical trend in direct democracy. Orum (1978) described political participation as “variety of ways in which people try to exercise influence over the political process.” McClosky (1968) gave a similar conception when he stated that of political participation is “those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and directly or indirectly in the formation of public policy.” Verbe and Nie (1972) defined political participation as “those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and or the elections they take.” Murphy and Danielson (2002) viewed political participation as simplest and cheapest form manifesting in voting and as a broader and complex form where citizens can influence the choice of public officials and public policies.

From the foregoing definitions, it has been established that political participation encompasses various activities that citizens employ in their efforts to influence policy making and the selection of leaders. It is also clear that some forms of participation are more common than others and some citizens participate more than others depending on a political system and its constitutional provisions. Agbaje (1999) argued that political participation in modern society tends to take one of the following three basic forms:

- i. The form of elections or selections, when people seek to participate in societal affairs through elected or selected representatives.
- ii. The form of routine individual or group involvement in the day today affairs of the society.
- iii. The form of shaping of public opinion on issues, events and – personalities of the day.

In line with the above contention, this paper focuses more on the form of elections or selections, when women seek to participate in societal affairs through elected or selected representatives to influence outcomes of policies in Nigeria's political system with particular reference to Sokoto State.

In addition to the forms, scholars such as Karl Deutsch, Robert Dahl and Lester Milbraith identified some typologies of political participation which are relevant in the examination of Muslim women's participation in politics. Deutsch (1970) classified participants in politics based on the position, method and the level of participation. Thus, he identified two broad categories of participants. These are the politically relevant strata comprising both active (who participate by voting or demanding or opposing a particular policy) and non-active (who participate by not voting or even not discussing politics). The second group is the elite strata comprising the marginal elites, the mid-elite core, the who-is-who elite, and the top elite with categories of individuals such as Clerks, small-scale business men, academicians, senior civil servants, military officers, captains of industry, Permanent Secretaries, Ministers, etc., depending on the position. For Dahl (1976), four categories of participants in politics emerged from his classification. These are political stratum (who takes part in basic political activities such as voting and discussing politics), apolitical stratum (these are the apathetic and are not even interested in politics), power seekers (those that contest for political office) and the powerful groups of individuals are mostly leaders of political parties. Milbraith (1965) classified citizens into three categories based on their participation in political activities. There are the spectator participants who enjoy seeing active participants; the transitional participants who contact public officer or political leader over issues; and gladiatorial participants who have the highest level of political efficacy. These typologies were used in determining the nature and categories of Muslim women that participate in politics of Sokoto State.

Another relevant issues considered by the paper are the factors that facilitate women to participate in the politics of Sokoto State. According to Anifowose and Enemuo (2005), several factors make individuals to participate in politics; these include need for power, competition, achievement affiliation, aggression, money,

prestige, status, recognition, approval, manipulation, sympathy and responsibility. In fact, these factors can be said to drive all parties to participating in politics. However, the correlation of these virtues or factors with Muslim women's participation in politics of Sokoto State is needed in order to examine the challenges and level of participation in the politics of the state as well as to determine strategies for effective governance in Nigeria.

An Overview of Women's Participation in Nigerian Politics

In Nigeria, women participation in politics started since the colonial time with the earliest efforts focusing on issues relating to environment, taxation, pricing of products, education and representation. For instance, in the Southern Province, when poll tax was introduced in 1918 by the Native Revenue Southern Province Ordinance No. 29 (Mba, 1982), women participated in the political scene by protesting against the ordinance. The ordinance required girls aged fifteen (15) and above to be taxed while for boys sixteen years was fixed for the eligibility of their tax. Beside poll tax, there were several other taxes which women were compelled to pay. These included water levy, market levy and others. In fact, taxation issues had led to several protests in the south including the famous Aba riots which involved an estimated five (5) million women in participation, in the entire Southern part of the country (Mba, 1982).

For participation in election, a number of elections had been recorded during the colonial rule that went in line with the country's constitution then. In 1914, Lord Lugard, the then Governor General set up a Legislative Council that provided for the participation of Nigerians from different parts of the protectorates for representation in governance (Ayeni & Akeke, 2008). However, the right to vote had developed only in the colonial period during the Clifford Constitution of 1922 which introduced the elective principle which allowed elections to the Legislative Council. That notwithstanding, elections were restricted to Lagos and Calabar (three members from Lagos and one from Calabar). These elections were based on property, educational qualifications, gender and social status of citizens. For instance, only adult males could vote under the 1922 Constitution. Also, under the 1922 and 1946 Constitutions, only men who earn 50 to 100 UK Pounds per annum were eligible to vote. Subsequently, franchise was extended to women in the Southern part of the country at various point in the decade of 1950, while in the Northern part women received their franchise only in 1976 (Pepple, 1992).

In essence, women in the North were barred from exercising their universal adult suffrage over two decades longer than their counterparts' women in the South. Under the broadened suffrage, all qualified adult citizens of Nigeria who are eighteen years irrespective of gender, class, and status are allowed to exercise the suffrage.

In general, despite the constitutional provision for full participation of women in Nigerian politics, there is the feeling that women have not been given adequate political awareness (Chizzes, et al, 1991). Kaura (2009) observed that concerted efforts are being made by women societies and associations as well as government to bring change in the participation of women in governance of the country. Equally, the United Nations Decade for Women, 1976 – 1985; the World Bank Special Projects

Fund for the Poor and Women have expanded inflow of assistance for women's programmes and increasing concern (NACEMA, 1991). In spite of these efforts, Akande (2002) observed that Participation of women in Nigerian politics is mostly limited to membership of women's wing political parties, clapping, dancing and cooking for the men at political rallies.

Muslim Woman and Political Participation

Islam, as a total way of life, has made it obligatory upon women to involve in politics of the *Ummah* (society) as the case with their male counterpart. This is because justice and equity are obligatory virtues that are expected from all Muslim both male and female; the exercise of these virtues can only be achieved through a government (Kaura, 2009). Thus, since the earliest period of Islam development, women have participated in politics of the Ummah by ways of electing leaders at all levels, criticised and fight against deviation perceived from leader, where the need arose (Kaura, 1995). For instance, pledge of *Aqbah* (homage) was a form of vote of confidence which the citizens bestowed upon a leader for the approval of his leadership. During the period of Prophet (SAW), he accepted homage from both men and women. Kaura (2009: 4) observed that "if the presence of women at the two *Aqbah* pledges was not as important as that of men, the Prophet (SAW) would have asked the men to come alone during the second *Aqbah* and pay homage for and on behalf of women." Opinion poll was another issue of reference on Muslim women's participation in politics. It was evident during the period of Caliph Umar Ibn al-Khattab; when he was attacked and injured, he constituted Shura Committee for the election of his successor. Some members of Shura Committee opted out voluntarily. Opinion poll was conducted by Abdurrrhman Ibn Auf on the candidatures of Uthman and Ali (RA) and women were equally consulted in consideration of their political roles during the time of Prophet (SAW) and Caliph Abubakar – RA (IET, 1992).

In generally, Muslim women's participation in politics can be categorised into four; namely nomination, campaign, election and governance (Kaura, 2009). In Nigeria, discourse of Muslim women's participation in politics has generally mixed with cultural and traditional constructions of role of women in the society rather than religious considerations. According to Mahdi (2009), the form and content of political activities have justified the 'safe' exclusion of Muslim Women by their fathers or husbands and in some instances their children. She maintained that the stigma attached to the personality of female politicians seeking political office has further removed Muslim women from the realm of partisan politics. Mahdi (2009: 6) reported:

This is evident in the few numbers of 'responsible' Muslim women registered in political parties, and even fewer seeking for elective office. In 1999, less than 30% of the 15 women in the national Assembly were from the Muslim North. In 2003, only about 40% of the 21 female legislators at the national level were from the Muslim states while 2007 has produced the most dismal numbers from the region with only one (1) of the nine (9) female senators being a Muslim from Niger State while in the lower

national chamber with twenty-six (26) female members only four (4) (Adamawa, Kaduna, Kebbi and Yobe) represent four (4) of the twelve (12) Shari'a states. In the States House of Assembly only three (3) of the twelve (12) Shari'a implementing states have female members. At the political party level, card carrying membership of six (6) of the major parties indicates a low number of married and even unmarried Muslim women. In effect, the percentage of Muslim women in politics to the overall population of women in the Muslim North is less than 0.5%

Participation of Women in Politics of Sokoto State

According to Paden (2008), the key understanding of Islam in Nigeria is to reconise the central place of the Sokoto Caliphate, which serves as a framework or model even today. Participation of women in politics of what is now known as Sokoto State can be traced back to early period of the Sokoto Caliphate. The first event of women participation in politics in the caliphate was the Bai'ah (homage) paid to Shaykh Uthman by Muslims at Gudu after the Ummah (Muslim community) emigrated from Degel in 1804 (Kaura, 2009). According to Kaura (2009), Women, like their male counterpart, paid homage to the Shaykh, when they promised to follow him in all matters in line with the provisions of the Shari'ah. It was evident that Abdullahi Ibn Fodio nominated Asma'u bint Uthman as vizierate (Prime Minister of the Caliphate), which she relinquished to her husband. Kaura (2009) argued that if she had not voluntarily relinquished the position, she would have remained the Prime Minister of the Caliphate, a position next in rank to the Caliph. Murray Last also reported that the same Asma'u administered Gombe Emirate by proxy, the position of which has subsequently passed on to her descendants (Kaura, 1981). Similarly, women influenced appointments of emirs in the Sokoto Caliphate. For instances, Maryam, one of the daughters of Shaykh Uthman, caused the appointment of Muhammad Bello as the Emir of Kano after the death of Emir Abdullahi.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that Muslim women in Sokoto State were historically and legally allowed to participate in the politics of the state as her counterpart man. However, in spite of this unlimited right, woman has not been actively participating into politics of the State, especially in the areas of seeking elected political office. It is evident that since the return to democratic governance in 1999, through the 2003, 2007 and 2015 elections, women have not secured the elected position of Member of House of Assembly or even local government council member talk less of the elected position of chairman of local government or highest position of governorship. The contention here is that what are the challenges and nature of women participation in politics of the state to such that they are only left on the voting and supporting activities of participation?

Table 1: Nature of Participation of Women in Politics in Sokoto State

S/ N	Category of woman	Nominatio n/ seeking	campaign	Election (Voting)	No voting at all	Total

		office									
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Employed married	4	0.53	5	0.67	20	2.68	18	2.41	47	6.30
2	Employed single	5	0.67	6	0.80	47	6.30	38	5.09	96	12.86
3	Unemployed married	4	0.53	8	1.07	19	26.40	33	4.32	24	32.43
4	Unemployed single	3	0.40	20	2.68	14	19.70	66	8.84	23	31.63
5	Employed Widow/divorce	4	0.53	17	2.27	9	1.20	3	0.40	33	4.32
6	Unemployed Widow/divorce	7	0.93	23	3.08	39	5.22	23	3.08	92	12.33
	Total	27	3.61	79	10.58	45	61.52	18	24.26	74	100
						9		1		6	

Source: Survey 2017

Table 1 explains the nature of women's political participation in Sokoto State. It identifies four (4) political activities, namely nomination or seeking political office, campaign including political rallies, voting during election and no voting at all but discuss about politics. The responses demonstrate that voting activity takes the highest percentage of women participation in politics of the state with 61.52%, and the least engaged activity being nomination of candidates by women and/or seeking political office by them with 3.61%. The data on the least activity participated by women of Sokoto State has confirmed what Mahdi noted about the percentage of Muslim women in politics to the overall population of women in the Muslim North, which she reported that it stood at less than 0.5%. Thus, table 1 indicates that within the categories of the least participation in politics unemployed single girls has the lowest of 0.40% while the unemployed widow and/or divorce took the highest percentage of 0.93%. This demonstrates also that some challenges are responsible for the Muslim women's low participation in politics.

Table 2: Challenges of Participation of Women in Politics in Sokoto State

S/N	Challenges	Married		Single/widow/divorcee		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	House work/ Business/studies	76	10.18	113	15.14	189	25.33

2	Restrictions by a guardian	27	3.61	33	4.42	60	8.04
3	Cultural/traditional belief	24	3.21	39	5.22	63	8.44
4	Lack of interest in politics	21	2.81	64	8.57	85	11.39
5	Distance of polling unit	22	2.94	36	4.82	58	7.77
6	undecided	36	4.82	67	8.98	103	13.06
7	Lack of political education	83	11.12	105	14.07	188	25.20
	Total	289	38.73	457	61.26	746	100

Source: Survey 2017

Table 2 identifies number of challenges with regard to women participation in politics of Sokoto State. Attending to house work especially by married women, focusing on small business and studies in respect to divorcees and single girls constitutes 25.33% and ranks highest of the challenges to participation in politics. The Challenge of lack of political education on the relevance of participation and representation in politics follows it with 25.20%. Distance of polling units is one of the challenges facing women exercising their voting right in the state with 7.77% ranking the least of the challenges. Trend of some challenges such as restrictions of woman participants by guardians, cultural and traditional beliefs as well as general lack of interest in politics that used to take higher level in the previous elections of 2003, 2007 and 2011 have drastically declined their position to average percentage of 8.04%, 8.44% and 11.39%, respectively. According to interview conducted, the “change” mantra that surrounded 2015 elections has affected the attitude of citizens towards politics including women as well as changed the efficacy of the factor of restricting women by their guardian or other cultural and traditional attitudes towards participation in politics.

Conclusion

The paper has examined the role of religion in governance in Nigeria by investigating into position of Islam concerning participation of women in political activities as well as examining the nature and challenges of participation of Muslim women in politics of Sokoto State. It was evident from the paper that Muslim women are enjoined by Islam to participate in political affairs of their society by nominating, campaigning and voting during an election. The paper established that 61.52% of women in Sokoto State participated in voting activity in 2017 general elections and 3.61% of the women population in the state minimally participated in nomination activity. The paper has also confirmed that attending to business, work at home and other personal or economic engagements as well as lack of political education are the utmost challenges of Muslim women’s participation of politics in the state constituting 25.33% and 25.20% of the entire challenges. To address these challenges, the paper suggested that a constructively designed programme with civic

and political education should be launched by the political community and religious leaders for the purpose of improving participation of women in political activities in the State and Nigeria in general.

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