

Patriarchal politics and women representation in governance in Nigeria, 1999-2023

Tukura, Tino Nashuka* and Suleiman, Engaya

Department of Political Science Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria.

*Corresponding author. Email: tukura.tino88@gmail.com; Tel: +234 8026504155.

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ABSTRACT: In some parts of Africa, discriminatory laws and policies restrict women's access to certain occupations and limit their property ownership rights. This limits women's political and economic participation, decreases their income-earning potential, and perpetuates gender inequality, hindering economic growth and poverty reduction. Nigeria as a post-colonial state adopted a democratic system based on non-gender discrimination in political participation, which was modelled after the British parliamentary democratic system. However, in Nigeria, the colonial legacy of marginalization of women in politics was intensified at independence in 1960 based on the patriarchal traditional norms of colonial Nigerian society of male dominance. This inequality is particularly problematic, as it contributes to a cycle of poverty and discrimination that disproportionately affects women and their economic status and well-being. Therefore, this paper intends to unravel how gender disproportionate representation in power structures leads to the marginalization of women in governance in Nigeria. The paper was anchored on structural-functional theory as its theoretical framework of analysis. The paper depended on the documentary method of data generation, using secondary sources. Content analysis was employed for the analysis of data generated from documents. This study found that gender disproportionate representation in power structures skewed in favour of the male gender accounted for the marginalization of women in governance in Nigeria. The recommendation here is that a system of gender quotas should be statutorily instituted for public service appointments, leading to a just and equitable society for all in Nigeria.

Keywords: Governance, marginalization, patriarchy, politics, women.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Globally, gender discrimination in governance remains a challenge, affecting women's access to equal opportunities, wages, and leadership positions. This is because, in many countries of the world, anti-discrimination laws are not effectively enforced, leaving women without adequate protection against work discrimination (ILO, 2023). In some parts of Africa, discriminatory laws and policies restrict women's access to certain occupations and limit their property ownership rights. For instance, customary laws governing land inheritance and ownership, restrict women's ownership rights and treat them as minors who can not inherit or manage land (IIED, 2022). Similarly, in countries like Cameroon, Chad and Equatorial Guinea, there is a policy requiring women to obtain permission from their husbands

before taking up employment (World Bank, 2022). Again, in Sierra, there is a law prohibiting women from working in the mine sectors, while Equatorial Guinea regulates the types of tools women can use in jobs (World Bank, 2022). These discriminatory practices are often rooted in patriarchal norms that confine women to domestic roles, perpetuating gender inequality, and hindering economic growth and poverty reduction (Kelly, 2019). As a post-colonial state, Nigeria adopted a democratic system based on non-gender discrimination in political participation, which was modelled after the British parliamentary democratic system. However, the colonial legacy of marginalization of women in politics was intensified at independence in 1960, based on the patriarchal traditional norms of colonial Nigerian society of male dominance

(Aiyede, 2007; Ojiakor, 2009).

Therefore, women's marginalization in Nigerian politics could be attributed to the colonial legacy in the country, which was reinforced by the different governments of post-colonial Nigerian society after the nation's independence in October 1960 (Gberevbie and Oviasogie, 2013). This is because, before the advent of colonialism in 1900, women played prominent roles in governing their respective kingdoms, empires, and emirates. For instance, the Queen Daura of Daura emirate in the present-day Katsina State, Queen Amina of Zazzau, now Zaria, of the Zaria emirate in the present-day Kaduna State, Ogiso Orhorho and Emotan of the famous Benin Kingdom in the present day Edo State (Faseke, 2001; Sani, 2001; Agaba, 2007; Ojiakor, 2009).

Similarly, women also played different vital roles in the palace administration of various Kingdoms in Yoruba-land as Iya-Afin (King's wife) and Iya-Oba (King's Mother); the roles of other brave women like Iyalode Aniwole of Ibadan in the present day Oyo State; and that of Morenike of Ile-Ife, who saved her people from war through political diplomacy cannot be overemphasized (Ikpe, 2004; Agaba, 2007; Aiyede, 2007; Ojiakor, 2009). In the same vein, the Igbo people of Delta State had a structure of political participation equivalent to those of the men to enable women to be part of the political process for good governance (Gberevbie and Oviasogie, 2013). For instance, there was the office of the Queen called Omu (female King), who was not the wife of the male King (Obi), neither was she related to him in any way, and there was a clear separation of power between the Omu and the Obi. While the Obi ruled the men, the Omu ruled the women for an orderly society (Faseke, 2001; Agaba, 2007). This is why Uchendu (1993) argues that in pre-colonial Nigeria, Igbo women participated in governance not as a privilege but as a right or duty to society.

However, through colonialism, the marginalization of women's participation in the Nigerian political process arose (Gberevbie and Oviasogie, 2013). This prompted Ikpe (2004) to argue that the colonialism experienced in Nigeria was male-dominated and evident in the abolition of the dual system of government that allowed male and female kings to rule side by side. Consequently, women chief in the various kingdoms before colonialism lost their power to rule and were no longer involved in decision-making (Nwankwo, 2006). Therefore, it is not out of place to argue from the above perspective that colonial rule enforced the dominance of men in politics to the extent that even when new chiefs were to be appointed; colonial representatives did not see women as capable of performing the roles of such office. As a result, women were confined to domestic work and home-making (Ikpe, 2004).

However, Nigeria's Fourth Republic, which started in May 1999, shows increasing marginalization of women in governance due to job segregation, the global gender pay gap, which stood at 16.3%, meaning that women earn

16.3% less than men on average by the World Economic Forum's 2022 Global gender gap report, the glass ceiling, which is a barrier that prevents women from advancing to the highest levels of their careers, and the violence intimidation of women in politics (Kelly, 2019).

However, the number of women between ages 20 years and above is 33,485,266, representing 50.10 per cent, while men make up 33,346,808, representing 49.90 per cent of the total population (NPC, 2009). Despite the large number of women over the age of 20, women are still marginalized or underrepresented in the political recruitment process, especially in contesting elective offices and appointment into political positions (Gberevbie and Oviasogie, 2013). Nigeria has low rates of female representation in politics by global and regional standards (Kelly 2019). It is worrisome that the Nigerian political party system has done little to encourage women's participation in politics, with women only making up a small percentage of nominees for governors, deputies, and legislative houses in the 2015 election. More so, the poor systems of governance result in pervasive discrimination related to sex, race, colour, religion, and political opinion, leading to persistent and prevalent gender disparities in Nigeria (Mboho and Ataire, 2018).

Scholars and social commentators have advanced propositions to explain the marginalization of women in government. Mozumder (2022), Rahman (2013), Mboho and Ataire (2018), Kelly (2019), McKinsey and Company (2021), Acker (1990), Eagly and Karau (2002), Reskin and McBrier (2000), Shah (2010), Kelan (2009), and Lockwood (2006) among others, have argued that women marginalization in governance emanates from gender stereotypes and biases, occupational segregation, work-life balance challenges and the lack of access to mentorship and networking opportunities, among other factors.

However, it could be argued that what one should consider as the driver of women's marginalization in governance in Nigeria is the gender disproportionate representation in power structures. This is attributable to the African and Nigerian traditional gender roles, which confine women to the domestic sphere, making it difficult for many women to participate in the political process coupled with the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian political system that promotes male dominance. Perhaps this partly explains why former President Mohammedu Buhari stated that his wife belongs to the kitchen, living room and the other room. It is in light of this that the paper interrogates how gender disproportionate representation in power structures accounts for the marginalization of women in government in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender power structures describe the unequal distribution of power and influence between genders within a society. This system manifests across various realms, from social

expectations and cultural norms to access to resources and decision-making. On the other hand, the marginalization of women in politics connotes the barriers women face to political participation, including discriminatory laws, cultural norms, and lack of support networks. This translates to underrepresentation in decision-making bodies and less influence on policies impacting their lives.

Although women participate in political activities, it is still challenging to find a situation where females are nominated during elections for higher positions in government. This has continued to happen because party chairmen are men, and the men hold other important positions in the party. Although women play a vital role in campaigning and mobilizing support for the individual parties, it is rare to find them where power belongs. Where women are to be relegated at the back, religion, tradition and beliefs are brought to solidify the society's ground for treating women as second class citizens. Despite many female organizations being established to fight for women's rights, it is still impossible for women to acquire up to five per cent (5%) of positions in policy-making institutions in the country (Mboho and Ataire, 2018).

The exclusion of women in politics has recently been identified as one of the major setbacks for economic development. The poor representation of women in elective positions has been a major social development issue since the beginning of the current democratization process in Nigeria. Politics as a real-world phenomenon is gendered. The world over, core conditions of people's lives, including their health, education, security, access to markets, public space, freedom of expression, and their work, are fundamentally shaped by their identification as being of a particular sex or gender group (Waylen *et al.*, 2013). Evidence around the globe indicates the path for women to hold elected office was achieved not only through the efforts of individuals but also with collective work through organizations (Mozumder, 2022).

As identified by Mazur *et al.* (2016), participants in the women's movement, including individuals and groups, both informal and formal, identify with women as a group and are framed as women representing women whose ideas are expressed as overtly gendered. Beckwith (2000) viewed women's movements as a subset of sociopolitical movements focusing on women's gendered experiences. The author went on to give women's sewing clubs as an example. Social clubs for women existed in the nineteenth century, but toward the end, many women's groups began to form with political leanings. According to Mazur *et al.* (2016), it was not until the early 2000s that scholars started having a consensus on the meaning of women's movements for comparative purposes (Beckwith, 2000). Although women's movements were treated by many early feminist scholars, such as Dahlerup (1986), Katzenstein and Mueller (1987), and Ferree and Martin (1995), as a significant analytical focus or variable, they tried to understand how changes like women's movements have influenced policy outcomes and in turn how these activities

have affected the movements.

In the earlier years, equal rights may not have been the cause championed by women's movements. Still, some traditional African societies sought to protect a woman's role of mothering and caregiving, which is not always empowering (Gouws, 2015). In recent times, however, the failure of the patriarchal-dominated state to incorporate women's issues into governance has seen women's movements springing up around the globe and, especially in Africa, since the 1990s. Thus, women's movements have evolved due to modernizing forces and processes of redefining the public (politics) and private sphere (household). There exists a long history of Women's movements in Western democracies, yet only a few conclusions can be drawn with confidence about their trajectories over the decades (Mazur *et al.*, 2016). There are different variations of women's movements in different regions of Africa in terms of their timing, character, influence, and effectiveness. Various organizations have helped educate voters, raise awareness about women's rights issues, lobby legislative bodies, and support women running for office. Even though some groups dissolved after their particular causes were no longer relevant, while other groups have been longer lasting, political groups for women continue to play a role in politics today.

Gouws (2015) observed that women's organizations are spreading and networking across Africa on an unprecedented scale and creating gender-friendly laws and constitutions. Therefore, in recent times, Women's movements, which were hitherto dominated by organizations engaged in "developmental" activities including income-generation, welfare concerns and home-making skills, have evolved to become organizations lobbying for women in decision-making positions in politics: pressing for legislative and constitutional changes, and conducting civic education. Women went further to form political parties on their own because women's concerns had not been adequately addressed by existing parties in the multiparty system (Holm, 1992). This is because, in many instances, women's political visions are different and do not align with existing party structures and, thus, are not accommodated; in some cases, the women wanted to build broader multiethnic and multi-religious constituencies than was possible with existing parties (Holm, 1992). Examples include the National Party in Zambia in 1991, started by Dr Inonge Mbikusita-Lewanika; the Zimbabwe Union of Democrats in 1999 by Margaret Dongo; and Kopanang Basotho in Lesotho, formed by Limakatso Ntakatsane. Likewise, in Kenya, parties were headed by Charity Ngilu and Dr Wangari Maathai; in the Central African Republic, Ruth Rolland-JeanneMarie led a party.

Similarly, in Angola, Amália de Vitoria Pereira led a party (Tripp, 1999). Women-led parties with broad male and female constituencies had sprung up in Zambia, Kenya and several other countries due to political parties' reluctance to increase women's representation (Holm, 1992). In Nigeria, however, although women do not yet lead political

parties, they have been organizing themselves to redefine their societal position since the pre-colonial period. In the last two decades, women's organizations have witnessed a significant increase, and many issues are being addressed. There are associations, cooperatives, trade groups, and faith-based organizations at local, state and national levels, and some with regional and international connections (Centre for Human Development, 2012). Despite the enormous achievements of the Nigerian women's movement so far, there remains a plethora of issues to be addressed; a major one is the greater involvement of women in political and decision-making processes.

The social and economic pressures which have become pronounced in the last two decades and the emergence of the male-dominated democratic system are harming past gains. There is, therefore, a clear need to rethink the approach to women's empowerment and gender equality, especially in increasing women's political participation (NWTF, 2019). This is because promoting women's participation through the role of women's groups in political dispensation is desirable based on equity, equality, and economic development. This premise is supported by the Feminist empowerment approach, which combines both Feminist theory and empowerment approach and Modernization theory. According to feminist theory, inferior status delegated to women is due to societal inequality shaped by political, economic and social power relations, and women should have equal access to all forms of power (Turner and Maschi, 2014). Similar to the concept of empowerment, feminist analysis helps women to understand how they are oppressed and dominated and often inspires them to engage in efforts to bring about broader social change.

Despite these concerns, the relationship between gender disproportionate representation in power structures and the marginalization of women in governance in Nigeria has received far less attention in the literature.

Theoretical framework

This paper employs the structural-functional theory developed by Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) as its analytical framework to explain patriarchal politics and women's marginalization in governance in Nigeria. The theory was popularized and advanced by scholars like Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) and Robert K. Merton (1910-2003). Structural-functional theory is a major sociological perspective that views society as a complex system made up of interconnected parts. The theory rests on the assumption that society is a complex system of interconnected parts, like organs in a body, that work together to maintain a state of equilibrium, and each part plays a vital role in the overall functioning of the social system. Proponents of this theory argued that social institutions, such as the family, education system, and economy, serve

essential functions for the survival and stability of society. For them, these institutions fulfil the basic needs of individuals and socialize them into shared values and norms.

The structural-functional theory also posits that social order is achieved through a consensus on shared values and norms and that these values and norms guide people's behaviour and promote cooperation, ensuring the smooth operation of society. According to this theory, social change is inevitable, but it occurs through adaptation and integration. Social structures adjust to meet new challenges and maintain equilibrium, but that dysfunctions within the system can lead to social change as society seeks to restore stability. Emile Durkheim emphasized the importance of social facts, shared norms, values, and social institutions in promoting social order and stability. Talcott Parsons on his part developed a grand theory of society that focused on the role of social structures, such as the family and the education system, in maintaining social equilibrium. While Robert K. Merton refined functionalist theory by introducing the concepts of manifest functions (intended consequences) and latent functions (unintended consequences) of social structures. He also emphasized the importance of dysfunction and the possibility of social structures having negative consequences.

Theory application

The justification for the use of structural-functional theory in this study stems from the fact that structural-functional theory offers some insights into the persistence of patriarchal politics and women's marginalization in Nigerian governance. Indeed, by highlighting the role of social institutions, like the family, in perpetuating societal norms, the theory remains a valuable tool for understanding the root causes of women's marginalization in governance in Nigeria. In essence, the theory highlights how deeply ingrained power dynamics and societal norms disadvantage women across all levels of society. In Nigeria, patriarchal family structures often socialize women towards domestic roles, apparent in the lower educational attainment rates for females compared to males according to the report of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Lower educational attainment is also a barrier to political participation. Similarly, the concept of dysfunction can be applied to the underrepresentation of women in governance in Nigeria. This is because the exclusion of a significant portion of the population from governance can lead to a less representative and less effective system.

By emphasizing the importance of dysfunction and exposing the possibility of social structures having negative consequences, this theory delves into the ways that institutions, societal and cultural norms, families, ideologies, and even language reinforce male dominance, perpetuating gender disproportionate representation in

power structures, leading to the marginalization of women in governance in Nigeria. Undeniably, in line with the basic assumptions of the theory, recognizing the limitations of individual achievement within a fundamentally dysfunctional system, structural-functionalism offers a valuable lens for understanding gender disproportionate in power structures and the marginalization of women in governance in Nigeria.

WOMEN'S MARGINALIZATION IN GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

Gender disproportionate representation in power structures is a crucial factor promoting the marginalization of women in governance in many African countries, especially Nigeria. This is because nations with very low female representation in government often have strong patriarchal systems leading to underrepresentation of women in governance, and even where women hold some positions of power, their voices and perspectives are often marginalized or ignored in terms of decision-making. Although in Nigeria, the proportion of women in elected positions increased slightly between 1999 and 2007, from an average of 2.3% across both houses of the legislature to 7.8% (Kelly, 2019), in the 2015 elections, Nigeria had 20 women out of 360 in the House of Representatives, constituting 5.6%, and 7 out of 109 in the Senate, representing 6.4%, putting Nigeria 180th in the World Women in Parliaments World Classification 2019 ranking (Kelly, 2019).

For example, in 2015, of 760 candidates for the positions of governor and deputy, only 87, constituting 11.45%, were women, and of the 747 candidates for senator, only 122, representing 16.33%, were women. In the same vein, of the 1,774 candidates for the House of Representatives, only 269, representing 15.16%, were women (NWTF, 2015). Again, the number of women serving as ministers and appointed executives was also meagre between 1999 and 2015. For instance, 11 of the 636 appointed executives between 1999 and 2015, representing 17.5%, were women, and 15% were ministers in the same period (NCWD, 2016).

Also, a Nigerian government statistical report shows that from 1999 to 2015, only 6% of local government councillors were women, 24% of judges in the federal court were women, and an average of 7% of each type of high-level government officials and senior administrators were women (Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The posts surveyed were head of service, permanent secretary, special adviser, special assistant, central bank governor, chief executive officer, director general, and executive secretary (Kelly, 2019). There was no female central bank governor between 1999 and 2015, and the role with the highest percentage of women at 28% was a special assistant (Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

Similarly, in the 2019 elections, women comprised 7.3%

of the Nigerian Senate and 3.1% of the House of Representatives, and no state governors were women (NWTF, 2019). According to the report of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2019), Nigeria has the lowest number of women in parliament in the world, with only 6.5% of seats held by women, and further declined to 3.9% as at 31st March 2024 (IPU, 2024). For example, in the 8th National Assembly, of the 360 members of the House of Representatives, only 14 constituting 3.8% were women, while men constituted 96.2%. Similarly, in the 9th Assembly, only 12 women representing 3% were elected into the House of Representatives, and men constituted 97%. In the current 10th Assembly, only 15 women representing 4% won the House of Representatives seats, while men represent 96%. In the same vein, only 4 of the 109 senate seats were won by women, constituting 4%, while men constitute 96%. This is far below 24% of women in the African Parliament.

Although 19 of the 42 current Nigerian cabinets representing 45% percent are made up of women, a higher percentage than the 23% global average of women in cabinets. However, women are underrepresented in various elective and other appointive governmental positions. For instance, in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, a total of 1,450 women contested out of 24,098 candidates, representing only 6% of all aspirants, showing a decline compared to the 2019 general elections, with almost 400 fewer women contesting (UN Women Nigeria Report, 2023). Of the 18 presidential candidates in the 25 February 2023 election in Nigeria, only one female candidate Ms. Chichi Ojei, the presidential candidate of the Allied People's Movement (APM) contested the presidency. Similarly, of the 419 governorship candidates that contested in the 18 March 2023 election across 31 out of the 36 Nigerian states, only 25 representing 6% were women. Of the 1,150 senatorial candidates, 92 representing 8% were women. In the same vein, of the 3,107 candidates, only 286 women, constituting 9% contested the 360 seats of the House of Representatives. Also, of the 10,225 candidates for the State Houses of Assembly seats across Nigeria, only 1,046 representing 10% were women (UN Women Nigeria Report, 2023). It is also important to note that of the 1,494 positions won in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, only 445 women representing 30% were elected to various positions. This figure is below the 35% women representation enshrined in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended.

Therefore, gender disproportionate representation in power structures in Nigeria evident in the underrepresentation of women in political offices and appointments, restricts women's ability to influence policy and legislation that impacts their opportunities. This discourages women from engaging in political activities and participating in the democratic process, ultimately undermining the legitimacy and representativeness of governance institutions in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In Nigeria, disproportionate gender representation in power structures, which is apparent in the underrepresentation of women in political appointments, elective positions, and unequal pay, limited access to training and promotion, thwarts women's career advancement, limiting their voices in the decision-making process, especially on issues that impact women's life. Despite progress towards gender equality, women in Nigeria, still face significant challenges in securing and maintaining meaningful employment. This is attributable to social norms and cultural beliefs in which deep-rooted gender biases limit women's perceived capabilities and aspirations. Also, legal frameworks and organizational structures often perpetuate discriminatory practices, and even more so, limited awareness of anti-discrimination laws and inadequate enforcement mechanisms further disadvantage women. Consequently, discrimination further contributes to a cycle of disadvantage, impacting women's lives and hampering development. Therefore, this study recommended that a system of gender quotas should be statutorily instituted for public service appointments, leading to a just and equitable society for all in Nigeria.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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