

CIVIC EDUCATION AND WOMEN DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA'S 2023 ELECTIONS: PRE, DURING AND POST ELECTION ROLES.

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ABSTRACT

Democracy is popularly conceived as a western idea which originated from Greece. As a result, it is seen as a mood of government in which every citizen of Greek City States participated in the governing process due to the smallness of the population. This special issue on 'Civic Education and women democratic participation' aims at highlighting women democratic roles in the 2023 general elections, the right to franchise and citizenship aspects of education, narrowing it down to the 2023 general election with expositions to the roles played by some women before, during and after elections. This is also to expand the discussion of democracy within education in a time when education is seen as the motor of global capitalism and the production of human capital. Women's participation in democratic process and system is strategic to national development, not only for women's empowerment but because it has a wider benefit and impacts on the polity. Also, in this study, the researchers convey research on human rights, civic education and political participation. The paper thus finally calls for a radical return to the indigenous democratic heritage as part of the decolonization process. To attain its goal, the paper first clarifies the concepts employed in this work namely, democracy, women, participation, development and education. It tries to answer the questions: How was democracy and women participation in the pre-colonial era? How had women responded to democratic processes? What role did the education play in the achievement of democracy in the 2023 election? What should be the role of women in an educated-democratic and none democratic state? What is the importance of education in democracy? What is the importance of democracy in development?

Keywords: Civic Education, Democratic Participation, Women Democratic Participation, Democracy.

Historical Background

Politically, in the pre-colonial era, Nigerian women were important part of the political set up of their neighborhoods. For instance, in pre-colonial Bornu, women played active roles in the running of the state, complementing the roles played by their male counterparts. So was it in the history of ancient Zaria. The modern city of Zaria was founded in the first half of the 16th century by a woman called Queen Bakwa Turuku. She had a daughter called Amina who later succeeded her as Queen. Queen Amina was a great and powerful warrior. She built a high wall around Zaria in order to protect the city from invasion and extended the boundaries of her territory beyond Bauchi and made Zaria prominent Commercial Centre.

The story was not different in ancient Yorubaland, where Oba ruled with the assistance of a number of women referred to as female traditional chiefs. They consisted of eight titled ladies of the highest rank. The significant role played by prominent women such as Moremi of Ife, Emotan of Benin and Omu Okwei of Ossomari, cannot be ignored. Moremi and Emotan were great amazons who

displayed wonderful bravery and strength in the politics of Ife and Benin kingdoms respectively, while Omu Okwei dominated the commercial scene of Ossomari in present day Delta State.

Mazrui (2000), advanced that, in most parts of Africa, traditional cultures, women were culturally supposed to have a triple role as custodian of fire, water and earth. As custodians of fire, the African women found themselves in charge of rural Africa's most important source of domestic energy, firewood as they trek long distances to collect it. As Custodian of water, the African women ensured water supply for the home and for the extended family. Again they often walk a mile or two to the lake or river. As Custodians of earth, they are the fertility of the womb (women as mothers) and the fertility of the soil (women as cultivators).

The status of women in India has seen many ups and downs since ancient times. In the post independent India, the status of women regained its strength and has been on a rise ever since. Women in post independent India have been participating in almost all types of economic activities, day-to-day household chores, voting for a better governance and also in active politics. India has elected a woman prime minister, Indira Gandhi, and a woman president, Pratibha Patil. In the present central government, women comprise roughly quarter of the Indian cabinet with portfolios like external affairs, commerce and human resource development ministries. At the ground level, India has a significant proportion of women in local level politics which has been achieved by reserving seat for women.

True democracy is a system which in Abraham Lincoln's words, is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. While most of the democracies have given a system which has government elected by all the sections of societies, it is debatable whether the government comprises of all the diverse sections and importantly whether the government works for all the people of the democracy. In this context, the problem of low participation of women is of special concern for democracies and without changing that true democracy can never be achieved.

Women's participation in decision-making is essential for women's interests to be incorporated into governance. It has been widely experienced that governance structures which do not provide for adequate participation of women, often suffer from state interventions that are neither inclusive nor democratic. Including women, especially in local governments are an essential step towards creating gender equal opportunities and gender sensitive policies. Since women have different needs and perspectives on social and political issues, it is important to involve women in governments to incorporate all of the societal viewpoints in policy and decision-making processes.

Introduction

Threatened by the persistent rise in prices of food mostly as a result of an increase in price of crude oil, the fuel scarcity, the redesigning of the Naira and the scarcity of money that accompanied it, the January 15th CBN's cash limit-withdrawal policy, not to mention the fear of insecurities around the country; the people of Nigeria were pressured to institute a new Nigeria despite the frustrations. The hardship in both economic and political affairs in 2023 compelled women of different ethnic groups, religious beliefs, political affiliations and work fields to rethink both their quantitative and qualitative democratic participation before, during and after electoral processes.

An individual is a product of the society and the nation he lives in. There is no doubt that just as the males have been contributing in most aspects of societal development in the nation's space, their female counterparts have done likewise. After these great men and women pass on, it is ideal that they are honoured as a sign of prestige, gratitude and lessons for the future generations (Thompson, et al., 2018.)

Democracy

The word democracy comes from the Greek words "demos", meaning people, and "kratos" meaning power; so democracy can be thought of as "power of the people": a way of governing which depends on the will of the people

In that case, is the way of governing which depends on the will of the people. This is the system of government by whole population or all the eligible members of the state, typically through elected representatives. It is the government of the people. In that cases, there is a belief in freedom and equality between people, or a system of government based on this principle, in which power is held by elected representatives or directly by the people themselves.

According to the former Secretary-General of the United nations, the late Kofi Annan (1998), 'No one is born a good citizen, no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth.' He emphasized the need for democracy as well as the youths inclusion in every nations political affairs.

Democracy, then, is not autocracy or dictatorship, where one person rules; and it is not oligarchy, where a small segment of society rules. Properly understood, democracy should not even be "rule of the majority", if that means that minorities' interests are ignored completely. A democracy, at least in theory, is government on behalf of all the people, according to their "will".

Education

The word Education is derived from Latin word. educere, educare, and educatum which means "to learn", "to know" and "to lead out". In that case it simply means schooling. It is to lead out internal hidden talents of a child or person. The Oxford Language dictionary defines education as an enlightenment experience. The process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university. The Greeks saw it as 'learning' or education that included such subjects as gymnastics, grammar, rhetoric, music, mathematics, geography, natural history and philosophy. According to Aristotle, it is the 'creation of a sound mind in a sound body'. Thus to him the aim of education was the welfare of the individuals so as to bring happiness in their lives.

Purpose

This paper sought a critical review of the important roles played by women in the February 25 and March 18th 2023 elections respectively. It also examines the factors militating against women participation in politics in relation to the socio-religious, ethno-tribal, and economic limitations placed upon them despite the rising advocacy platform to ensure greater inclusion of women in politics.

What is Civic Education and How Does it Help to Facilitate Democracy?

Civic Education in a democracy is education in self government. It is the study of the rights and duties of citizens, government and civic environment. Hence, a democratic self government means that citizens are vigorously involved in their own governance; they do not just inertly agree to the pronouncement of others or agree to the demands of others. In that case, Voter education is paramount for the realization of every nation's dream. The term voter education is usually used to describe the distribution of information, resources and agenda designed to inform voters about the specifics and mechanics of the voting process.

Voter and civic education can be critical in enhancing women's participation before, during and after elections; particularly in post-conflict countries in which women have not traditionally played an active role in the electoral process. Voter and civic education should therefore be accessible to women

as well as to men. The information conveyed should be gender-sensitive and designed to be relevant to women. Civic education can help enhance women's participation in elections particularly through the dissemination of positive images of women as voters, leaders, and participants in all aspects of the political process.

Why is it Necessary to Educate Voters?

In every election, voter and civic education are necessary to ensure that all participants - men and women alike - understand their rights, their political system, the contests they are being asked to decide, and how and where to vote. For an election to be successful and democratic, voters must understand their rights and responsibilities, and must be sufficiently knowledgeable and well informed to cast ballots that are legally valid and to participate meaningfully in the voting process.

Out of the total of 93.47 million registered voters, only 24.9 million persons voted in the 2023 presidential and National Assembly elections. This represents a meager 26.72 percent voter turnout, the lowest since the return to democracy in 1999." (Amata, 2023). Data from the election management body shows that Nigeria's voter turnout has been declining almost every year since 2007. Voter turnout went up from 52.3% in 1999 – the first general election in fourth republic – to 69% in 2003. But it's been on the decline nearly ever since – 57.5% in 2007, 53.7% in 2011, 43.7% in 2015 and 34.8% in 2019. For 2023, it was 28.63%. Increasing voter registration has failed to translate into more voters turning out!

How Did Women Progress in the 2023 Elections and How Has Education Helped as Well?

In all societies and eras, the struggle for political visibility, participation and leadership of women has been a recurrent issue. Not excluding most developed democracies as over the past few years, Nigeria had recorded low participation of women in politics and democratic processes. According to Vanguard, September 26, 2023, 8.9% of candidates were women in the 2023 election. According to Punch March, 2023, 378 women ran for Senate and House of Representatives seats, but only 17 were successful. While all the current female senators are not returning, seven of the current 13 female members of the House in the Ninth National Assembly also lost their re-election bids. Nigeria needs to adopt effective policies to attract more women into decision-making at all levels in public and private affairs.

Of 12.29 million people who completed the Permanent Voter Registration (PVC), 6.22 million were women, which is 50.6 per cent. However, the decline in females elected into government may have resulted from the low levels of female candidacy recorded during the process. Only 1,550 out of 15,307 candidates in the 2023 general elections were women. There was only one female presidential candidate and no female Vice-Presidential candidate across the 18 parties that contested the presidential elections. This has caused a lot of anxiety among women groups, as the fight for gender inclusion in government seems not to yield the desired result, and even though a great deal of improvement has been recorded in many western countries, Africa still ranks low generally. However, before the election, and in their various political affiliations, women had engaged themselves in campaigns and voter sensitization despite the decline in the female representation in government. On the 25th of February, 2023, there were videos making the rounds on the internet relaying the experiences of people at their pooling units. One of the videos revealed one popular woman who had fought dedicatedly alongside others, both males and females to ensure they exercised their franchise.

Chioma Chukwuka Akpotha.

It was revealed on the actress' facebook page and other live streaming social media that Chioma Chukwuka had caught video of the moment political thugs restlessly scattered her voting unit. 'A large portion of the voters at the polling place could be seen scrambling for shelter, while other attendees

could be seen opposing the thugs. The actress alleged that other women had mistreated her as well. However, at a later time, the armed troops got involved causing normalcy to be restored and voters to exercise their rights.’(Pulse Nigeria, February 25, 2023) Even though Akpotha took to her social media page to allege that thugs disrupted the election at her polling unit in Eti-Osa Local Government Area, Lagos, and had claimed that she was “abused and beaten” by a woman at the venue’, the popular actress was countered by Georgina Onuoha, her colleague in the profession as she was referred to as a “cow shouting” over electoral violence. (Vanguard, 26 February, 2023)

The Heroine of democracy: Professor Nnennaya Oti

Nnennaya Oti, the current vice chancellor of FUTO who was the INEC returning officer for 2023 Abia State Governorship Election, revealed; “As an electoral officer, I have never in my life participated in any election, but duty came calling, I made my enquiries from Abuja... if I perish, I perish, they came with their threats, they came with their money, they came with their intimidation.” (The Sun 2nd April, 2023.) She was also quoted to have said at the collation office in Umuahia, during the election that as a mother and pastor, she would not comprise the process. This lady is one of many women who have commanded exemplary and proven integrity in the 18th March, 2023 Gubernatorial and House of Assembly Election and whose role was and is still greatly felt.

Her words have become golden when she stated her commitment in the face of pressure that she will do the right of the people and protect democratic values: “I shall stand squarely and unapologetically on these principles. The people’s votes and mandate shall stand. The pastor and the mother in me will not permit me to do anything that will adversely affect the future of our children.” These words of Nnannaya-Oti have become golden and eternally etched on marbles in the annals of women development in Nigeria. This noble woman and a product of an institution of learning drew commendation from both local and international observer groups including the Pan African Women Projects (PAWP). Thousands of students and staff members of her university rolled out drums to welcome her back to the institution amidst a heroic celebration; describing her as the “heroine of our democracy.” Many struggled to touch, shake or hug her. Some sang and spread cloths on the ground in her honour, while some of the students sang and called her “a mother with the heart of gold.” clamoring that she had made the people’s votes and mandate count in the Abia State Gubernatorial and House of Assembly Elections of 18th March, 2023. During an interview with Sahara Reporters, she revealed that she was offered a financial incentive to manipulate the election results yet she stood out.

I was threatened, offered bribe to manipulate Abia Governorship Election – State Returning Officer, Prof Oti alleged. Following her refusal, the INEC national headquarters which engaged her for the job suspended collation and announcement of governorship results on Monday, March 20 to review the results of the local government areas. On Wednesday, March 22, she was asked to do the right thing, and the candidate of the Labour Party, Alex Otti was announced as the winner of the poll. (Chidimma Uchebun; Daily Champion Newspaper, March 28, 2023)

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

One other woman who had played a role in the post electoral period of the 2023 general election was Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, is well known as a writer and storyteller, best known for her themes of politics, culture, race, and gender wrote and published a letter to Joe Biden through The Atlantic, a U.S.-based newspaper, on the 5th of April 2023 titled, ‘Nigeria’s Hollow Democracy’. This letter was said to have shook the table. In Adichie's open letter to Joe Biden, president of America, she had stated that many Nigerians had come out to vote, holding in their hands a

new sense of trust. Even though it was a cautious one, but it was still trust. This letter was written out of disappointment that undue process was being celebrated as reflected in Nigeria's Hollow Democracy!

What followed was a breach of that trust, when on February 26 social media became flooded with evidence of voting irregularities: "numbers crossed out and rewritten; some originally written in black ink had been rewritten in blue, some blunderingly whited-out with tipex. The election had not been rigged only, but done in such a shoddy and shabby manner that it insulted the intelligence of Nigerians...The ruling party's candidate, Bola Tinubu, was eventually announced as the President-elect of Nigeria. "Rage is brewing," Adichie writes, "especially among young people. The discontent, the despair, the tension in the air has not been this palpable in years." (The guardian; April 7, 2023)

Conclusion

Women participation in Nigerian democratic processes is a topic of importance as well as the quality of civic enlightenment. It is worthy to note that despite the challenges women face, women activism and advocacy, education of women, positivity on the part of successive governments towards women empowerment, and interest of women to participate in politics is getting a lot of positive energy. This is an indication that the participation of women in the application of democracy in electoral processes has a bright future. However, can they be said to be further encouraged by the society in which they have come to find themselves or would they be disheartened by the prevalence of the society? Also, If democracy is government by the people, are there any real democracies in the world? All round inclusive education is paramount in the achievement of an absolute democracy. The connection between human rights and democracy is deep, and goes both ways: each is in some ways dependent on the other, and incomplete without the other. First of all, the values of equality and autonomy are also human rights values, and the right to take part in government is itself a human right. Thomas Jefferson wrote that we must: Educate and inform the whole mass of the people . . . They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty. Hence, With education, the common man would be able to select leaders wisely and fight back against the tyrannical instincts of those in power. However, a "democracy" is also incomplete without a thorough-going respect for human rights.

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