WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS: THE NIGERIA AND ANGOLA EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT
Women's political participation is a key indicator of democracy, gender equality, and human development. However, women in Africa face many barriers and challenges to access and exercise their political rights and influence decision-making processes. This paper examines the factors that affect women's political participation and representation in Nigeria and Angola, two African countries with different historical, cultural, and political contexts. The paper address issues such as the Women's Political Participation: Africa Barometer 2021, the Working Paper on Women's Political Participation and its Predictors in Northern and Southern Nigeria, the Call for Papers on Women's Equal and Effective Participation in Political and Public Life, the Report on The Power to Change: Women's Participation and Representation in Africa, and the Briefs on Women's Political Participation by UN Women. For the purpose of this paper, information was gathered from documentary sources and analyzed using content analysis. Cultural Modernity Theory propounded by Zygmunt Bauman (2011) was used as a framework of analysis. The finding showed that women participation in politics has increased significantly in Nigeria and Angola. The paper therefore recommends strengthening the implementation and enforcement of affirmative action measures, such as gender quotas, at all levels of government and across all branches of power.

Introduction

Drawing from international standards, both men and women should be granted equal rights and opportunities worldwide, particularly in active engagement across all levels of political processes. Globally, women make up more than half of the world's population and significantly contribute to general societal development. Women play crucial roles in various aspects, such as being mothers, producers, home managers, community organizers, and socio-cultural and political activists. The emergence of the latter role is attributed to the women's movement (Ajbalajobi, 2009).

Politics involves the authoritative allocation of values (Easton, 1961), where values represent our current or imminent desires. The allocation of these values or resources has often been contentious, leading to disputes among competing groups claiming that the distribution either excluded them entirely or marginalized and outmaneuvered them. Such disputes create discord in the political process. Democracy is widely adopted as a method to address this problem, aiming to ensure citizen participation in decision-making. The realization of democracy relies on a genuine partnership between men and women, working together equally and complementarily. This collaboration is expected to draw mutual enrichment from their differences (Nwabueze, 1993:2).

Democratic governance is built on the principles of freedom, justice, and the fair treatment of all members of society, regardless of gender, with development as its terminus (Ogbonna, 2020). This foundation is rooted in the idea that democracy is not just a state's political best practice casted on the value of self-preservation of all actors, but requires an equal opportunity platform for political participation and the decision-making process (Sodaro, 2001:27). As equal political participation is deemed essential for democracy to thrive (Anifowose, 2004), a society cannot achieve true democratization without the active involvement of women, who make up approximately 50% of the population in most countries. It is crucial to integrate a gendered perspective into the policy-making process to ensure sustainable democracy. Globally, gender equality is acknowledged as a prerequisite for achieving development and democratic governance, allowing both men and women an equal say in decision-making, policy implementation, and the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (Ezeilo, 2008).

Women, who constitute about 50% of Nigeria's population, still encounter difficulties, despite the democratization efforts in many countries and the feminist movements demand for gender balance in global politics. The low involvement of women in Nigerian politics became a serious issue after the military rule ended and the country transitioned to civilian democratic governance in 1999. The Nigerian Government tried to address this problem by ratifying national and international instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1989. It also implemented various policies and protocols, such as the National Policy on Women in 2000 (which was later replaced by the National Policy on Gender Equality in 2007), the Platform for Action, the National Committee on Affirmative Action, the Additional Protocol to The African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa 2003, The African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality 2004, and The National Gender Policy 2006 (Akiyode & Arogundade, 2003; Ajayi, 2007). However, gender inequalities, discrimination, and stereotypes continue to exist in all aspects of Nigerian politics, despite seven successive changes in government through democratic processes (in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2023).

Gender inequality is an obstacle that prevents women from fully using and developing their abilities and contributing significantly to the maintenance of democracy. The goal of democratic consolidation in Nigeria and Angola cannot be reached if women, who make up about half of the population, remain marginalized. Persistent stereotypes, prejudices, and societal expectations that often perceive women as passive, dependent, incompetent, or unsuitable for public office. Limited access to information, infrastructure, transport, and communication, hindering women from obtaining political education, registering as voters or candidates, accessing polling stations or campaign venues, and expressing their opinions. Subpar segregated education, limiting opportunities and skills for women with disabilities to engage in political processes and assume leadership roles impedes women political participation in politics. Certain restrictions deprive women of their right to vote or be elected, especially when they are

under guardianship or matrimony. There are various forms of violence against women, including physical, sexual, psychological, or economic abuse, affecting their health, safety, dignity, autonomy, and impeding their involvement in political activities. Lack of proper support for political participation, encompassing inadequate reasonable accommodations and personal assistance that would enable women to exercise their political rights and responsibilities. Unequal resources, referring to the insufficient financial, human, or social capital that women need to run effective and competitive political campaigns, often exacerbated by poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and isolation (Ogbonna, 2020).

Conceptual Clarification

Gender

Gender is commonly defined as socially constructed attributes tied to being male or female, shapes expectations and values in a given context (Waylen, 1994; Henderson, 2006). Oostergaard (1992) characterizes gender as the qualitative, interdependent nature of women's and men's positions in society, shaped by power dynamics. These relations are socially constructed and not strictly biologically determined (Colley, 1987), with gender roles seen as behavior patterns influenced by socialization and socio-cultural factors (Ajayi, 2007; Enemuo, 2005:227). Shapiro (1991) emphasizes the cultural conformity to gender distinct from biological sex. Gender divisions, rooted in the social division of labor, are not biologically fixed but influenced by production and reproduction conditions, and reinforced by cultural, religious, and ideological systems (Kendall, 2004; Frye, 1983:146 & Frank, 1995:144). Throughout history, these attributes have historically favored men, resulting in a universal asymmetrical pattern where women are culturally subordinated rather than biologically predetermined (Omotola, 2007).

Democracy

Democracy, although not novel, has become a significant global trend, ensuring equal opportunities for both genders to participate and influence power distribution (Pateman, 1970; Agbaje, 1999:193; Anifowose, 2004:205). Founded on principles of freedom, justice, and equal treatment for all citizens, regardless of gender (Nwabueze, 1993:2), democracy, according to Sodaro (2001:27), relies on providing an equal opportunity platform for political participation and decision-making. Political participation is vital for democracy, ensuring stability and legitimacy (Anifowose, 2004; Agbalajobi, 2010:75). Almond and Verba (1963) propose that a combination of three political orientations leads to a routine, stable, and democratic system. As equal political participation is crucial for democracy, true democratization necessitates the active involvement of women, constituting approximately 50% of the population (Sodaro, 2001:27). Therefore, integrating a gendered perspective into politics and policymaking is imperative for democratic governance, providing both men and women with equal voices in decision-making and policy implementation.

Theoretical Framework

Zygmunt Bauman's cultural modernity theory serves as the framework for analyzing women's political participation in Africa, specifically in Nigeria and Angola. Exploring Zygmunt Bauman's theory of cultural modernity, the analysis delves into the dynamics of contemporary society marked by fluidity, uncertainty, and individualization. Bauman describes modernity as "liquid," signifying its shift from solid structures to a more dynamic yet precarious state. In the context of women's political participation in Africa, liquid modernity presents both opportunities and challenges. Women can leverage new technologies to challenge traditional gender norms and advocate for their rights. The diversity of liquid modernity may foster tolerance and recognition of women's identities. However, liquid modernity also poses threats, complicating the political landscape and exacerbating inequalities faced by women. It may undermine collective actions, promoting individualism and weakening the sense of community among women. Connecting Bauman's theory with women's political participation in Africa demands a nuanced analysis of the contradictory effects of liquid modernity, recognizing women as active and diverse agents shaping and being shaped by their evolving societies.

A comparative examination of cultural modernity levels in the two countries and their impact on women's political empowerment. Utilizing data from sources like the World Values Survey or the Afrobarometer Survey,

one can assess gender-egalitarian attitudes and values in Nigeria and Angola and their correlation with women's political engagement and representation. The interaction between cultural modernity and various factors such as socioeconomic development, historical legacies, institutional designs, and socio-cultural elements also influences women's political participation in both nations. Additionally, the role of media, civil society organizations, regional and international frameworks, and other actors in either promoting or challenging cultural modernity and women's political participation requires analysis. According to the cultural modernity theory, indicators like the gender empowerment measure (GEM), gender development index (GDI), gender gap index (GGI), or gender equality index (GEI) can gauge a society's level of cultural modernity. These indicators encompass dimensions such as economic participation, educational attainment, health, political participation, human rights, and freedoms. A higher score or rank on these indicators signifies a greater level of cultural modernity and gender-egalitarianism in a country (Sass, 2011).

Examining the latest available data from the World Economic Forum, Nigeria ranked 128th out of 156 countries on the GGI in 2021, with a score of 0.645. In contrast, Angola ranked 94th out of 156 countries on the GGI in 2021, with a score of 0.698. This suggests that Angola exhibits a higher level of cultural modernity and gender-egalitarianism compared to Nigeria, based on this particular indicator. However, it's crucial to recognize that these indicators might not capture all aspects of women's political participation, necessitating complementary qualitative and contextual analysis. Such analysis should consider historical, cultural, and political factors, including the influence of colonialism, nationalism, independence movements, civil wars, and democratization processes on women's political engagement in Nigeria and Angola. Moreover, exploring the impact of diverse factors such as ethnicity, religion, language, and regional identity on women's political participation is essential in understanding the nuances of their representation in these countries (Agbalajobi, 2010:75).

Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that cultural modernity and gender-egalitarianism are not rigid or unchanging concepts; rather, they are dynamic and evolving, capable of transformation over time and across different geographical contexts. Consequently, it becomes essential to continually assess and appraise the advancements and obstacles related to women's political engagement and representation in both Nigeria and Angola. This evaluation should extend to comparisons with other nations in Africa and beyond. Additionally, there is an opportunity to pinpoint and draw insights from successful practices and innovations that have effectively promoted women's political participation and representation in these countries or in other regions globally.

Women in Nigeria's Politics

Across Nigeria's historical timeline, women's involvement in politics has undergone fluctuations. In pre-colonial societies, women played a complementary role in traditional governance, although not equal to men (Mba, 1982:37; Nwankwo, 1996:20; Ikpe, 2004:23; Akinboye, 2004:236; Ajayi, 2007; Awe, 1992:11). This role, embedded in sex segregation, delineated gender positions and power, affording women specific spheres of operation and control (Olojede, 1990:82). However, the colonial administration disrupted these traditional systems, establishing a patriarchal government that reinforced gender inequality through policies and economic interests (Allen, 1972; Omotola, 2007; Lewu, 2005:65; Mba, 1982). The colonial legislative council in 1922 marked a pivotal development in Nigerian political history, yet women were deliberately excluded, initiating the masculinization of politics and women's alienation (Akiyode & Arogundade, 2003:77).

While women in South Western Nigeria exercised voting rights in the 1959 elections, their Northern counterparts didn't enjoy this franchise until 1976 (Enemuo, 1999:232). Women's political activism during colonial times, such as the Aba women's riot in 1929/30 and protests by the Abeokuta Women's Union led by Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, contributed significantly to the struggle for independence (Nwankwo, 1996:16; Adu, 2008:27). However, these gains didn't translate into substantial decision-making participation, with men dominating leadership roles in political parties like NNDP, NCNC, and NYM during the nationalist era (Ahonsi, 2001:151). In the 1958 elections, only Wurola Esan secured a Senate position out of 36 members, and no woman was elected to the 312-member House of Representatives, highlighting the limited

progress for women in decision-making roles (Nwankwo, 1996:17).

Women in Angola's Politics

The engagement of women in Angola is a multifaceted subject encompassing historical, political, social, economic, and cultural dimensions. Over the years, Angolan women have encountered both challenges and opportunities in their pursuit of equality and empowerment, notably against the backdrop of a prolonged civil war that concluded in 2002. Democracy is defined as political power reliant on the people for decision-making. In Angola, recent efforts to empower women in politics have yielded positive outcomes, fostering a healthy environment where women actively participate across the three branches of power – executive, legislative, and judicial. The executive branch, in particular, stands out in Africa for its significant empowerment of Angolan women, with notable representation in parliament. Recognizing the pivotal role of political power in women's empowerment across various sectors, it is imperative to uphold belief in the capacity of Angolan women for decision-making and to enhance their participation in society, contributing to the acknowledgment of women and the promotion of gender equality. The project's goal is to explore how Angolan women have progressively gained prominence in recent years, particularly in parliament; a noteworthy achievement given that 52% of the Angolan population comprises women.

Angolan women played a crucial role in the struggle against colonialism and the subsequent civil war. Many joined the armed forces of major factions like the MPLA and UNITA, serving as combatants, nurses, cooks, and messengers. Some women emerged as leaders and activists in supporting political and social movements aligned with the warring parties. Following the civil war's conclusion, Angolan women confronted numerous challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, violence, displacement, health issues, and limited access to essential services and resources. They also grappled with the war-induced trauma, loss, and restrictive social and cultural norms impeding their rights and opportunities. Despite these hardships, Angolan women have made notable progress in various areas. For instance, women's representation in the national parliament surged from 15% in 2003 to 33.6% in 2022, positioning Angola among the countries with the highest proportion of female parliamentarians in Africa. Women have also experienced increased access to education, healthcare, employment, and entrepreneurship. However, substantial gaps and challenges persist, demanding attention to achieve gender equality and empower women in Angola. Key areas for focus include reducing maternal mortality and adolescent pregnancy rates, enhancing women's access to land, credit, and technology, eliminating harmful practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation, combating gender-based violence and discrimination, and promoting women's involvement in decision-making at all levels (Enemuo, 1999:232).

Factors That Affects Women's Participation in Politics in Nigeria and Angola

i. **Socio-cultural Influences**: Women's political engagement in Africa is influenced by socio-cultural factors, including patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes that confine women to domestic roles, limited education and literacy levels among women, the extensive burden of unpaid care work and poverty constraining women's time and resources, religious and traditional beliefs discriminating against women's rights, and various forms of violence undermining their dignity and security. These factors create a challenging environment for women's entry and success in politics, impacting their self-confidence, aspirations, and motivation to participate. Recommendations to address these issues include sensitizing and involving men, boys, religious and traditional leaders, and other stakeholders to support women's political participation, advocating for women's human rights and gender equality through legal and policy reforms, empowering women through education, training, economic opportunities, and health services, redistributing unpaid care work through social protection and infrastructure, and preventing/responding to violence against women in politics and general contexts.

ii. **Regional and International Dynamics**: The regional and international factors influencing women's political participation in Africa encompass

frameworks and instruments promoting and monitoring women's political involvement, such as the Maputo Protocol, the African Union Gender Strategy, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. These factors provide a normative foundation and political leverage for women to assert their rights and roles in politics, as well as a platform for learning, sharing, and networking among women across countries. Recommendations to strengthen these factors include ratifying, domesticating, and implementing regional frameworks and instruments at the national level, fortifying regional mechanisms and institutions overseeing and supporting women's political participation, increasing women's representation in regional bodies and processes, and collaborating with international partners and organizations advocating for women's political participation.

iii. **Electoral Systems**: The type of electoral system significantly affects opportunities and incentives for women to run for office and be elected. Nigeria employs a first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, favoring candidates with substantial financial and political resources and often excluding women and minorities. Angola utilizes a closed-list proportional representation (PR) system for legislative elections, allowing parties to rank candidates and allocate seats proportionally. This system can provide more space for women's representation, especially if parties adopt gender quotas or zipper lists (alternating male and female candidates).

iv. **Affirmative Action Measures**: Affirmative action measures, aiming to boost the representation of women and other disadvantaged groups in decision-making roles, have been adopted in both Nigeria and Angola. Nigeria's National Gender Policy of 2006 sets a 35% target for women in elective and appointive positions, but implementation and enforcement remain incomplete, resulting in low women's representation across government levels. Angola's constitutional quota mandates 30% women in the National Assembly and the government, proving effective in elevating women's representation in the legislature but falling short in the executive branch.

v. **Political Parties**: Political parties serve as the gatekeepers of political participation and representation, determining candidate selection, resource allocation, and the political agenda. Women in Nigeria and Angola encounter numerous challenges within their parties, including inadequate support, discrimination, harassment, violence, high nomination fees and campaign costs, and male-dominated structures. Leadership positions and decision-making bodies within parties are often elusive for women. Strategies to enhance women's participation and representation within parties involve training and mentoring programs for women candidates and leaders, creating networks and alliances among women across party lines, advocating for gender-sensitive reforms and policies, and implementing monitoring and accountability mechanisms to ensure adherence to gender quotas and commitments.

vi. **Electoral Laws and Management:** Electoral laws and management encompass the regulations and procedures governing elections, affecting women's participation and representation in various capacities such as voters, candidates, election officials, and observers. Nigeria has implemented measures to facilitate women's voting, such as special queues for specific groups. However, challenges such as electoral violence, fraud, and intimidation pose threats that may discourage or disenfranchise women. Angola has adopted measures to enhance election transparency, including biometric voter registration and electronic transmission of results. Challenges in ensuring inclusiveness and competitiveness, such as restrictions on civil society organizations and media outlets, may limit diversity in the electoral process.

vii. **Media:** Media plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and influencing political behavior, providing a platform for information, education, awareness, and advocacy on women's political participation. However, women in Nigeria

and Angola encounter obstacles in accessing and utilizing media due to gender stereotypes, bias, misrepresentation, underrepresentation, harassment, and censorship. Strategies to improve women's participation and representation in media include training and capacity-building programs for women journalists, media professionals, and activists, promoting gender-sensitive reporting and coverage of women's issues and achievements, enhancing media literacy and digital skills for women voters and candidates, utilizing social media and alternative platforms for women's voices and views, and advocating for gender equality and diversity in media content and ownership (Akiyode&Lanre 2003).

Successful cases of women's political participation in Nigeria and Angola

In Nigeria, women have played a crucial role in advocating for democracy and human rights, particularly during the military rule of the 1980s and 1990s. They engaged in various forms of activism, including protests, rallies, strikes, petitions, and campaigns, demanding the restoration of civil rule, the release of political prisoners, and the preservation of human dignity. Noteworthy women activists and leaders in this movement include Kudirat Abiola, Hajia Gambo Sawaba, Margaret Ekpo, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, and Hafsat Abiola. In Angola, women have achieved notable progress in increasing their representation in parliament and government, owing to a constitutional quota of 30% for women in the National Assembly and the government. As of 2020, Angola ranked 10th globally and 2nd in Africa for women's representation in parliament, with 38.6% of women MPs. Angola also saw 30% of women ministers and 23.5% of women deputy ministers holding key positions. Influential women politicians and leaders in Angola include Ana Dias Lourenço, the First Lady and former Minister of Planning, Isabel dos Santos, the former Chairwoman of Sonangol and Africa's wealthiest woman, Cândida Celeste da Silva, the Speaker of the National Assembly, and VerónicaMacamoDlhovo, the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In Nigeria, women have also made significant strides in the judiciary and civil service, attaining some of the highest positions and delivering landmark judgments and reforms. Notable figures in Nigeria's judiciary and civil service include Maryam Aloma Mukhtar, the first female Chief Justice of Nigeria, Amina Bello, the first female Chief Judge of Kebbi State, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the former Minister of Finance and the current Director-General of the World Trade Organization, and Amina Mohammed, the former Minister of Environment and the current Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations. In Angola, women have actively contributed to the peace and reconciliation process and the country's social and economic development following decades of civil war and instability. Women have participated in various initiatives and platforms to promote dialogue, justice, human rights, democracy, and development (Anifowose, 2004)

Conclusion

The paper concludes that women's involvement in African politics is a nuanced and intricate phenomenon necessitating a thorough and context-specific examination. While women in Nigeria and Angola have achieved some advancement in political participation and representation, numerous challenges persist, curbing their potential impact. The paper proposes potential strategies to surmount these challenges and amplify women's political engagement in both countries.

Recommendations

1. Bolstering the implementation and adherence to affirmative action measures, including gender quotas, across all levels of government and throughout various branches of power.

2. Advocating for the reform and revitalization of political parties, fostering inclusivity, democracy, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to the needs and interests of women.

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