

Religiosity and Sexism as Indices of People's Perception of Women in Politics in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the influence of religiosity and sexism on people's perception of women in politics. Two hundred (200) participants were selected through convenience sampling technique. Participants were made up of 100 males and 100 females with ages ranging from 18-45 years ($M=25.47$; $SD=7.43$). Three instruments which are; Perception of women in politics Scale, Sexism questionnaire (SQ) and Religious Affiliation Scale (RAS) were employed to elicit data for the study. The 2×2 independent Chi square was employed for analysis. The result of the study indicated that religiosity and sexism significantly influenced people's perception of women in politics. The positive influence that religiosity recorded was due to education and social change. Based on the findings we recommend that society should tackle sexism from its roots and also that women should stop playing supportive roles in politics but rather be at the forefront to crush abnormal sentiments and complexities in Nigerian politics that have slowed down her development.

Keywords

Perception, Women in Politics, Religiosity, Complexities, Sexism

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1. Introduction

Politics is defined as who gets what, when, how; and the study of influence and the influential (Laswell, 1936). Influence concerns the tuning of people's behaviour in line with an actor's will, and the influential according to Laswell are those who get the most of what there is to get. Millet (1969) argued that politics is a term that can be used to describe any power structured relationship or an arrangement where one group of persons is controlled by another. Politics therefore, influences how resources and opportunities are allocated to different segments of society and often than not, these resources are allocated in disproportionate terms. Those who allocate these resources are imbued with power which in

one way or the other has been legitimized. This is why politics is defined as the authoritative allocation of values in a society (Easton, 1965).

Both men and women are supposed to effectively and efficiently participate in politics. But over the years, women have been relegated to the background, classified as inferior, mediocre and second class citizens. Anigwe (2014) found that women are grossly underrepresented in political leadership in Nigeria and attributed this to factors including gender inequality and male dominance. For Kasomo (2012) women have made great strides in obtaining the right to vote and to be voted for and they comprise less than 15 percent of the members of legislature, and less than 5 per cent of heads of states worldwide bringing about inadequacy in terms of

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affirmative action. Chuku (2009) and Nebolisa (2009) asserted that although there has been an increase in the numbers of women in legislative bodies, African women continue to be under-represented in all structures of power and decision-making. In Kenya, traditional perceptions of women as inferior to men prevail as many people uphold cultural practices which enhance the subordination of women (Kasomo, 2012). Consequently, men continue to dominate women in political, economic, social, and religious realms. Women's political endeavors, achievements, and roles in society are hardly recognized or acknowledged. This situation has necessitated the clarion call that women should be empowered by giving them due status, rights, and responsibilities to enable them participate actively in decision making at the political level. In Nigeria, some fields of human endeavor are perceived as predominantly male and as a result women had for long suffered various forms of gender discrimination, inequality and preclusion, especially in the area of politics. This is due cultural stereotypes, abuse of religion and traditional practices. Discrimination affects both sexes but women have suffered far more from it (Amadi: 1982). Basically, this study examined two major factors that seem to influence the way people perceive women in politics: religiosity and sexism.

2. Literature Review

Religiosity is an important concept that plays a major role in the life of people and it refers to one's level of religious commitment. The level of religiosity of people provides consolation to them as well as enhances their sense of belonging, identification, self-image and self-esteem. Allport and Ross (1967) identified two basic dimensions of religiosity: extrinsic and intrinsic. They interpreted extrinsic religiosity as a self-serving and utilitarian outlook on religion that provides the believer with comfort in salvation. Intrinsic religiosity is the internalization of the total creed of faith that goes beyond mere church/mosque/shrine attendance.

People's level of religiosity may change their perception of many activities going on in life including their perception of women in politics. Khimish (2014), for example, stated that the idea of sex-segregation in Islam is one of the strongest factors that hinder women from participating in public activities. Olufade (2014) also observed that religion is an accomplice in the stereotyping of Nigerian women and reinforces people's negative perception of women in politics and hinders them from participating in politics.

The theoretical framework for the nexus between religiosity and perception of women in politics is hinged on the constructivist theory of Jerome Bruner and the social learning theory of Albert Bandura (Bandura 1960; Bruner 1977). The

constructivist theory postulates that learners construct new ideas or concepts based on what they already know- that is people actively build their perception of the world and interpret objects and events that surround them in line with their experiences. In other words, their current state of knowledge guides them in processing, substantially influencing how and what new information is acquired. Thus, the knowledge people have acquired from their religion may influence the way they perceive women in politics. When people are religiously indoctrinated which perhaps commenced in childhood, they construct their own world and hold strong views which may appear to influence their perception of women in politics. The adequacy of Bandura's cognitive learning theory hinges on his position that learning as a cognitive process takes place in a social context and can occur purely through observation even in the absence of motor reproduction or direct reinforcement. Basically people may learn to discriminate against and marginalize women by observing significant people, who play the role of models in a society. These significant figures include parents and religious leaders. Some individuals who are orthodox in their religion thoughtlessly and strictly observe, imitate and adopt religious contents as taught by a particular religious doctrine. These individuals interpret religious contents in a rigid, close-minded and dogmatic fashion. They ensure that they behave and learn from their model all they have observed without adding or removing anything because they believe that their significant figures can never err. For example, when it comes to politics orthodox Christians may learn to discriminate against women from their fellow Christian men and women whom they see as significant in their lives and this may influence their perception of women in politics. While Muslims may also learn to discriminate and marginalize women from their fellow significant Muslim brothers and Imams who strictly believe that according to the words of Muhammad and the Quran that men are in charge of women (Quran 4:34) and the men are degrees above them (Quran 2:228). The orthodox Muslims may learn from their models that a woman should keep her home as a focus of her attention and activities and make it the base of her affairs and not to be seen at all not to talk of involving in politics. Religious followers who copy these significant others might be ignorant of the fact that some religious leaders overemphasize the dogmas that subjugate women due societal pressures emanating from patriarchy; while downplaying the teachings that places woman in equal standing with men. (see, Ephesian 5:2, Romans 2:11, Galatians 3:28, Quran 49:13, 9:71, 33:35)

The impact of religion on gender attitudes is largely argued to be the outcome of the role of religion in legitimating inequalities within societies, so that religious individuals tend

to hold less egalitarian values based on the belief that these inequalities are justified and based on a 'natural' order (Diehl, Koenig & Ruckdeschel, 2009; Inglehart & Norris, 2003b). People who are committed to their various religious affiliations tend to ascribe natural functions that focus on the domestic role of women and the breadwinning function of men. Based on their religion they tend to view women and girls as the prime caretakers of children, the elderly and the ill. They view women as homemakers and doers of domestic tasks. These restrictive gender roles according to Nebolisa, (2009) affect women's participation in politics.

Sexism is gender discrimination that is particularly documented as affecting women and girls and it includes the belief that the males are intrinsically superior to females. It is perpetuated by systems of patriarchy - male-dominated social structures leading to the oppression of women. An unmistakable form of systematic oppression is hostile sexism, which is defined as any antagonism toward women who challenge male power (Glick & Fiske 1996, 2001). Two theoretical depositions- Eagly's (1987) social role theory of gender differences and Bem's (1981) gender schema theory are appropriate for explaining the role of sexism in people's perception of women in politics. Social role theory emphasizes that inherent physical differences between males and females lead to sexual division of labor in the society and gender roles. Kacmar, Bachrach, Harris and Zivnuska (2011) argue that woman due the internalization of social gender models conform to societal expectations with regards to gender roles. They therefore maintained that gender differences occur as a result of social learning and reinforced by societal power and status relations. Gender schema theory which was formally introduced by Sandra Bem as a cognitive theory to explain how individuals become gendered in society, and how sex-linked characteristics are maintained and transmitted to other members of a culture argues that gender -related information is largely transmitted through society by way of schemata or networks of information that allow for some information to be more easily assimilated than others (Bem, 1981). The theory centered mainly on individual differences in schematic processing of gender-related information. It states that gender schema development begins only when there is a mastery of gender activities and the children are able to label themselves and others as males or females. The gender schema is presumably formed from interactions with the environment and it includes knowledge of activities, interests, personality and social attributes about gender related activities. Basically, once the schema is developed, children are expected to behave in ways consistent with traditional gender roles even when they become adults later in life. This brings about sexism or gender discrimination in roles in many spheres including

politics.

Extant literature have emphasized the discrimination of women and girls in various ways (Jost & Kay, 2005) as men are given agentic stereotypes, such as being independent, ambitious, and competitive, while women are assigned communal stereotypes, such as having nurturing, interdependent, and considerate characteristics, which are suitable for the duties of a proper wife and mother (Good & Sanchez, 2009). While these domestic roles are important to society, they tend to enforce the idea that women are subservient to men, as well as incompetent and incapable of playing many other roles without their support.

Despite the much trumpeted claims of achieving equal rights, the dignity and worth of persons which is the purpose of Women Convention, extensive discrimination against women continues to exist, contrary to many provisions condemning the practice in the United Nations instruments and measures (Galey 1993: 116). Consequently, women participation and progress in government and politics in Africa still lingers behind that of the men (Nebolisa, 2009). Although there has been an increase in the number of women in politics, the minimal participation of women in politics affects their progress in improving the legal and regulatory framework for promoting gender equality. The above scenario is maintained by the fact that African governments do not offer substantial protection for women who wish to pursue careers and participate in government (Chamley 2011). In Nigeria, people seem to have this belief that the male child has more value than the female child. They appear to believe that a male child is predominantly superior to a female child in all ramifications because he is looked at as the one to bear the family's name and ensure its existence in the society. This research is targeted at discovering if religiosity will significantly influence the way people perceive women in politics and also if sexism will significantly influence people's perception of women in politics. It is therefore interested in examining two assumptions: one is that religiosity has a tendency to significantly influence people's perception of women in politics and the next is that sexism will significantly influence people's perception of women in politics.

3. Method

Participants

Two hundred (200) participants comprising of one hundred (100) males and one hundred (100) females within the age range of 18-45 ($M = 25.7$) were included to the study. They were selected through purposive sampling technique from three local government areas in Owerri comprising 80 participants from Owerri North, 50 from Owerri Municipal and 70 From Owerri West.

Instruments

Three instruments consisting of perception of women in politics scale, Sexism Questionnaire (SQ) and Religious Affiliation Scale (RAS) were employed in this study. The perception of women in politics scale was developed by Chilor (2009) and validated through a pilot study involving 20 students of Imo State University. A coefficient of internal consistency (Chronbach’s Alpha) of.76 was derived. Owing to the insufficient psychometric information on the scale, the researchers conducted a pilot study using ninety (90) participants. They got a Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of.86 and the coefficient of internal consistency of the items ranges from.83 to.86. From the analysis, 5 items that do not represent the construct were dropped and a total of 10 items were retained. Also a norm of 7.3 was derived. The scale measures the level of people’s perception of women in politics and it has two response options “yes (1)” and “No (0)”.

The Sexism Questionnaire as the next instrument is a 22-item questionnaire (SQ) developed by the researchers. The purpose of the instrument is to measure an individual’s level of sexism- that is the extent to which the person discriminates against women. The researchers conducted a pilot study using 90 participants and got a coefficient of internal consistency of.90. 16 items were deleted from the original 38 items because of their inconsistency with the construct. The remaining 22 items were scored directly on a 4-point Likert format ranging from strongly agree (4) to strongly disagree (1). The researchers also carried out a split-half reliability study and derived a Guttman coefficient of.91. To test its validity, the instrument was correlated with an attitude towards women scale by Spencer and Hemreich (1978) and an above average concurrent validity coefficient of.65 was obtained. The norm for the scale is 46.5 implying that participants with scores below this cut off have low level of sexism and vice versa.

The Religious Affiliation Scale (RAS) as the third instrument was developed by Omoluabi (1995). It measures an individual’s level of religiosity. The RAS contains 21 items scored directly in a true or false format. The items are scored by multiplying the number of items shaded true by three. It was validated by Erinoshio (1996) who correlated it with life satisfaction index by Neugarten, Havighurst and Tobin (1961) and obtained a divergent validity coefficient of.26. Omoluabi (1995) also reported a three -week interval test- retest reliability coefficient of.97. The norm for the scale is 35.4.

Procedure

The Procedure involved face to face administration of the questionnaires to the participants upon contact with them. The questionnaires were distributed to people around Bank road (Ministry of Finance, Treasury Headquarters) in Owerri

Municipal, Amakaohia in Owerri North and Ihiagwa market in Owerri West. The permission of the participants was sought before administration and they were informed that the study is strictly for research purposes. Explanations on the instructions and the meaning of some of the items were given upon request, especially to illiterate participants. At the end of the exercise, the researcher immediately collected the questionnaires and thanked the participants for their time and cooperation.

Design /Statistic

The study utilized a cross-sectional survey research design. This is because segments of large populations were studied at different places at particular points in time. The Chi square statistic was used for data analysis owing to the nominal nature of the scale employed to measure the response variable.

4. Results

Table 1. Chi square Result showing the Association between perception of Women in Politics and Religiosity.

RELIGIOSITY					
Perception of women in Politics	High	Low	Df	X ²	Sig.
Negative	58(66.7)	34(25.3)	1	7.64	.01
Positive	87(78.3)	21(29.7)			

P <.05

Based on the X² result presented above, the first hypothesis which posited that religiosity will have a statistically significant relationship with perception of women in politics was accepted [X² (1) = 7.64, P<.05]. This denotes that religiosity influences how people perceive women in politics.

Table 2. Chi square Result showing the Association between perception of Women in Politics and Sexism.

SEXISM					
Perception of women in Politics	High	Low	Df	X ²	Sig.
Negative	76(62.1)	16(29.9)	1	17.73	.000
Positive	9(72.9)	49(35.1)			

P <.05

Similarly, the result above is also significant and the research hypothesis which assumed that sexism will have a statistically significant relationship with perception of women in politics was accepted [X²(1) = 17.73, P<.05]. Thus sexism is associated with people’s perception of women in politics.

5. Discussion

The first assumption of this study that religiosity will significantly influence people’s perception of women in

politics was confirmed. The study showed that a greater number of participants with high religiosity (87) had positive perception of women in politics as opposed to negative perception (58). Conversely, a greater number of participants with low religiosity (34) perceive women negatively in politics than their other counterparts (21). One plausible explanation for this finding is social change. Over time, people from different religious persuasions have learnt to perceive women positively when it comes to politics. This change may have been occasioned by globalization which enables people from developing states to follow up political activities of developed countries.

The direction of this finding is in contradiction to most studies in Nigeria and other African nations. In other words, even though most of the studies confirm a strong nexus between religiosity and the perception of women in politics, they observe that religiosity negatively affects people's perception of women in politics; and this is opposed to the finding of this study. Thus, Agbalajobi (2010) observed that religious beliefs are at the base of people's discrimination against women. For him, even though Nigerian women constitute about half of the population of the country and contribute in vital ways to societal development, they are discriminated against and religious beliefs constitute the major factor for the negative perception and consequent relegation of women to the background in the field of politics. Also Erunke and Shuaibu (2013) studied the role of women in the Nigerian politics and revealed that women have been sidelined in the political scheme of things in Nigeria and one of the major factors militating against women participation in Nigerian politics is the high level of religious beliefs of people. Dziva; Makaye; and Dube (2013) also observed that people with high religious beliefs in rural Zimbabwe perceive women negatively when it comes to politics and they relegate women to a peripheral position in society while Okafor and Akokuwebe (2015) discovered that religious discrimination and religious practices are among factors inhibiting women's participation in leadership and politics. Karl (2001) averred that religious belief is among the factors affecting women's political participation.

The second hypothesis which indicated that sexism has no significant influence on people's perception of women in politics was rejected. This entails that sexism significantly influences people's perception of women in politics as participants with high sexism had more negative perception of women in politics than their counterparts with low sexism. The studies of Okuchukwu (2015), Yusuf & Yusuf (2014), Mofoluwawo (2014) and Musingafi, Kaseke, and Chaminuka (2015) support this finding because sexism was found to be associated with the way people perceive women in politics in their respective studies. In contradistinction, the study of

Dolan (2010) reported that there was no evidence that beliefs about women lead voters to evaluate individual candidates differently than their male opponents in politics. A host of Nigerian authors have attributed the discrimination and consequent low participation of Nigerian women in politics to patriarchy and culturally supported male dominance (Okuchukwu, 2015; Musingafi; Kaseke and Chaminuka, 2015; Mofoluwawo, 2014; Falade, 2014; & Makama, 2013). Patriarchy is a form of sexism supported by culture. Makama (2013) examined the conceptual and material bases of patriarchy and gender inequality in Nigeria and revealed that patriarchy in all its manifestations is the major cause of discrimination against women and their low level of involvement in politics. Okuchukwu (2015) asserted that Nigerian women have experienced immense marginalization in party politics and gender role-patriarchy is among the major factors responsible for the low participation of women in party politics. Musingafi, Kaseke and Chaminuka (2015) discovered that despite the noble and egalitarian values shared by the nation, women still continue to be dominated by men as patriarchy is the biggest impediment against women's political participation and representation. Yusuf and Yusuf (2014) observed that entrenched and institutionalized patriarchal system is at the root of the subordination and exclusion of women in politics.

Mofoluwawo (2014) also observed that women's participatory level in government and decision making is below 50% currently, and the causes of women discrimination in Nigerian politics are directly associated with gender complex, because women are seen as inferior to men in the Nigerian society and culture. Currently in Imo state, people appear to believe that women should be subordinate to their husbands and take care of the house and children rather than involving themselves in politics which they regard as a dirty game that should only be played by men. Falade (2014) revealed that in Ondo State Nigeria, there is a marginal involvement of the Nigerian women in the political process and this can be attributed to male dominance in society as people negatively perceive women who participate in politics.

6. The Role of Complexities

Nigeria, women have not actually presented themselves as partners in politics. Hence, majority of women believe that there are positions, comments, statements assumed to be for men; contrary to that, they rule against their fellow women who think otherwise. A married woman feels superior to an unmarried one (Nwazonobi 2013: 127) and therefore discriminate against the unmarried in all ramifications including politics. In the face of religiosity and sexism, few

women in Nigeria have done well in politics. It is on this self-defeating syndrome of women that Nwazonobi (2013: 53) submits, starting with a question:

“Can any country thrive effectively without responsible women and men in leadership? Women are paying lip-service to their demand for equal opportunity and representation in governance, else why would women agitate for the Constitutional “Office of the First Lady” without looking at the consequences. If such a right is granted ‘vices’ and ‘deputies’ would be insignificant because governance will be more of a family affair as wives of presidents and governors will deputize them”

Women are busy forming wives associations instead of vying for political positions. Women have lifted sexism up from where religion stops.

Institutionalized sexual discrimination is a far more serious matter, for it makes women second-class citizens, and this is what feminists are fighting against (Amadi: 1982). Similarly, Nwazonobi (2000) asserts that ‘Human rights as enshrined in the constitution is same as women’s rights rather women are under the bondage of culture, that it is time they break the shackles of culture and reclaim their political power.

In the African traditional setting, ethics, religion and politics, of the people are entrusted in the hands of religious leaders women inclusive. There are female and male deities with priests and priestesses who were and are still administrators of their various communities in decision making. Sexism is more in western religion than it is in Traditional Religion. On this note, Amadi (1982: 73) citing Meek (1971:155) in his discussion on sexual discrimination observes that,

“Although Nigeria is a man’s country, there have been several outstanding women. Queen Amina is a notable example. She ruled Zaria for thirty- four years early in the fifteenth century, and under her that kingdom became the most powerful in central Sudan. But there are also women in purdah in some parts of the Muslim north and, among some Yoruba, women who must kneel whenever they bring food to their husbands”.

It seems men have failed in Nigerian politics due to the nominal role of women in politics. A Nigerian woman is proud and meticulous about her husband’s position and political career than hers. She can mobilize and campaign for other women to vote for her husband. Eventually when the husband succeeds, she will liaise with other women married to men of same status with her husband to form wives association to intimidate other women. Similarly, a greater number of Nigerian women idealize men and comfortably, play supportive or nominal roles to pave ways for their husbands and sometimes rub politically minded women of

their chances and opportunities in active politics. On the other hand, most Nigerian men see women in politics as a sex toy for their sexual satisfaction. This contributes in making the conditions of participation too difficult for women who are reserved and would not want to be labelled by society as ‘loose in morals’.

7. Conclusion

Religiosity is excessively or sentimentally religious. High religiosity in the face of the ever increasing social change occasioned by globalisation and education will indeed positively moderate people’s perception of women in politics. The present study contradicts most studies carried out on religiosity and women in politics but affirms that religiosity has a positive and significant influence on people’s perception of women in politics in Nigeria. We believe that the negative perception of women in politics in Nigeria is more of sexism than religiosity. Sexism is rooted in sexual stereotyping which is the tendency of treating people as cultural stereotypes on the basis their sex. Despite obvious biological differences, social differentiations between men and women known as gender is socially, culturally and religiously misconstrued (Nwazonobi, 2000: 93).

Without mincing words, gender roles can be transformed through social changes induced by education, economic transformation, incentives and policies. Parents should give balanced roles to their children regardless of their gender in order to tackle sexism from its roots. Breaking culturally induced gender roles will give women more confidence and drive to achieve their political dreams. We recommend a balanced religiosity and not extremism; as this will help to control the negative perception of women in politics.

For Nigeria to develop; men and women must contribute their quota; women especially must participate actively in elective positions. There is a great difference between elected positions and political appointments. The former involves more power and authority while the later thrives on privilege which can be withdrawn at the least provocation. Government should therefore continue in its struggle to achieve greater affirmative action for women in the area of politics.

It is time for Nigerian women to realize that they discriminate against themselves more than the men discriminate against them; there is need for attitudinal change on the side of women to gain political power and relevance. Nigerian women should come together to demand for equal participation in politics. They should develop a class consciousness, encourage and build support for any woman who is vying for any elective position during election. Men need women’s votes to win in elections, because the

population of women is greater than that of men.

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