

Female Political Participation in the 2003 Elections in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigerian Scholars have repeatedly engaged the poor incorporation of women in politics and governance in Nigeria. Just prior to the 2003 elections, different women organizations suggested steps they hoped would reverse inadequate female political participation and women's poor representation in government and provided conditions under which women would vote political male contestants. The extent to which the different political parties took women serious can be gleaned from this paper, which, focusing on political party campaigns and the national elections in 2003, argues that greater female political participation at all levels of the political process can be made possible in Nigeria.

Key words

Nigerian women, political participation, elections, citizenship

Introduction

It was once concluded that female participation in politics in Nigeria is tantamount to “venturing into uncharted waters” (Mba & Osinulu, 1996, p. 19). These authors argue that the totality of Nigeria's socio-cultural environment depoliticizes the female gender, who in the eyes of the society, are non-incident to power and authority. The reality of their words stands in opposition to the knowledge we have of Nigerian women's political performance before the colonial era. Although then the degree of female political participation differed between the northern and southern parts of the country, it is consistently acknowledged that women held recognizable political offices in each; and equally important was their influence at the communal or village levels,¹ what in the last

¹ This theme is exhaustively discussed by many authors including the following: Allen. (1972);

two decades would become known as the grassroots' level. Nigerian women's political roles became considerably confused and altered by British colonialism that distorted indigenous practices, not just those relating to politics and governance (Ranger, 1995; Mba, 1982). Female absence in the political and governance structures remains one of the bequests of the colonial experience to the modern Nigerian polity, thereby casting doubts indeed on the reality of pre-colonial female political performance in the various political entities unified by colonial conquest to constitute present day Nigeria.

In more than four decades of existence the Federal Republic of Nigeria has alternated between parliamentary democracy and military dictatorships. Since independence in 1960 Nigeria has known roughly eighteen years of civilian rule: 1960 - 1966, 1979 - 1983, and since 1999. From 1960 until 1996, female presence in ministerial and sub-ministerial positions in the different military and civilian administrations was below the world average of 9.1% (Oguonu, 2002). The statistics on elective offices on the 1999 national elections show that only 25 female political officers emerged as against 583 male political office holders (Oguonu, 2002, p. 263); giving a ratio of 2.78% (for female officers) to 97.22% (for male officers). Very many countries are still struggling to attain gender parity in political leadership but Nigeria's record falls below the average for African countries south of the Sahara where significant improvements have taken place in the last decade with respect to female political performance. Remarkable examples include South Africa, Botswana, Rwanda and Uganda (Nzomo, 2000; Luiz, 2002). The engagement in this preliminary research report with Nigeria's 2003 elections is to spot what improvements occurred with respect to female political performance generally that can be integrated into the country's political culture.

When this study was designed in 2003, it was planned to consist of two parts: The first carried out in 2003 and involving an evaluation of that year's national elections; the second, to be done four years later, to consist of an evaluation of the 2007 elections. The goal was to compare the two elections to identify the trajectories of female political participation and activism in Nigeria as well as to assess the extent to which the gains (and lapses) of the 2003 experiment would be reinforced

(or corrected) by the 2007 elections. This article is the product of the 2003 study. It looks at the events surrounding the 2003 elections in Nigeria and highlights its prospects for greater female political participation in the hope that it would enhance their increased participation in structures of governance in the future. A qualitative research methodology was adopted for this study. Oral data for this assessment were collected between June and October 2003 from seventeen persons whose ages ranged from thirty-two to sixty, resident in Enugu, Anambra and Abia States in southeast Nigeria and in Bauchi State in Northern Nigeria. The collaborators whose remarks were used in this study belong to different social clusters and different educational levels, including also the uneducated. While one half belong to the upper middle class, mostly senior civil servants, the other half comprise the self employed. Female collaborators constitute two-thirds of those interviewed. What all collaborators share in common was their participation in the 2003 elections either as voters or simultaneously as voters and members of different political parties.² Also used, in addition to the interviews, were personal observations and information from informal discussions with several other people. Open ended questions were asked about the collaborators activities during the campaigns and the elections and their personal assessments of these activities. The interviews and informal discussions were in a mixture of the vernacular and English. Nearly all interviews were recorded on tapes. Relevant points from the discussions were jotted down after the sessions.

Conceptual Clarifications

Running through this report are the terms “politics,” “political

² Oral information on the 2003 elections came from interviews conducted from June to October 2003 with the following persons: Mrs. Obi Okeke, 42 years, Awgu, Enugu State; Mrs. J. Azubuike, Omoba, Abia State; Mrs. Bessie Onusologu, 60 years, Orumba, Anambra State; Mrs. Funanya Ibe, 49 years, Awgu, Enugu State; Ms. Ngozi Enwerem, 38 years, Ahaba-Imenyi – Isuikwuato, Abia State; Mrs. Angel Anazodo, 38 years, Nnewi, Anambra State; Mr. Goodluck Ebicha, Omoba, Abia State; Mr. Uche Anyamele, 46 years, Ohafia, Abia State; Mr. Francis Egesie, Umudike, Abia State; Mrs. C. Chijioke, Umudike, Abia State; Dr. Ukpabi, Umudike, Abia State; Ms. Ijoma Odu, Owuta-Eda, Abia State; Ms. Ego Agha, 42 years, Ahaba-Imenyi –Isuikwuato, Abia State; Mr. Nnadi Uzoigwe, 32 years, Isuawa-Awgu, Enugu State; Dr. (Mrs.) F. Abdulrahmann, 45 years, Maiduguri, Borno State; Mrs. D. Ojobe, 63 years, Enugu-Ezike, Enugu State; and, Mrs. V. Onah, 45 years, Ovoko, Enugu State.

participation” and “governance.” Politics has a wide range of meaning. Broadly speaking politics refers to social relations involving authority or power as well as methods and tactics used to formulate and apply policy. It ranges from the progression of candidates to office, to the conduct and contests of parties with reference to political measures and the administration of public affairs.³ I use politics and political participation with reference to processes by which Nigerian citizens gain access to power, which in turn enables them make decisions on the running of the nation. Supporting this view are Verba, Nie and Kim (1987) who identified the four common types of political participation as consisting of campaigning, voting, communal activity and particularized contact. Political activity may or may not lead to the holding of a political office but often, and, for some key actors, election or appointment to government positions is the anticipated result of their political involvement. With respect to women in Nigeria who have fewer chances to engage in politics like men, the emphasis particularly in this report is not hinged on their political positions as much as the generality of their activities that fall within the range of political action. Governance is used with reference to the act of exercising authority. It has been the norm in Nigeria for authority to trickle down from the top levels of government to the lower levels (Gana & Egwu, 2003). Under civilian regimes positions at these levels were contested and filled through elections. Mostly men have held high political and administrative positions and therefore have been more able than women to influence the state of affairs of the country.

Nigerian women have been very vocal with respect to their political participation. Women’s public contributions in the sphere of sociopolitical development, starting from the pre-colonial era until recently, are well known. These efforts are responsible for scholarly interest on Nigerian women’s social and political roles (Ekejiuba, 1967; Hafkin & Bay, 1976; Mba, 1982; Markovitz, 1987; Verba & et al., 1987; Mba & Osinulu, 1996; James & Etim, 1999). A recurring issue in most accounts on Nigeria’s political process is women’s poor representation in central government, a representation that partly derives from an equally poor participation in politics. In James and Etim’s work, contributors to the

³ Definition of Politics and Governance from *The Free Dictionary*. Retrieved August 28, 2007, from <http://freedictionary.org>

section on “Sociopolitical Development Processes” aligned Nigerian women’s political disempowerment with national development problems (James & Etim, 1999), making a case for political democratization. Johnson and Oyinade argued for women’s increased political participation to a degree that would reverse the historical legacy of male dominance of politics in Nigeria with origin in pre-independence times (Johnson & Oyinade, 1999, p. 18-19). Concerns with Nigerian women’s political exclusion engage Nigerian and other academics at academic forums the world over.⁴ Discussions ranged from the causes of women’s marginalization to its possible remedies. The range of studies dealing with issues of women and politics in Nigeria cannot be exhaustively analysed here but of note is the fact that the scarcity of women from structures of government and their sidelining from full political engagement result in national and local priorities being defined with very little meaningful input from them in spite of the fact that their life experiences give them a different awareness of their communities’ needs, concerns, and, interests from that of men (Chandler, graham, Jaime, & Nunez, 2006).

“Grassroots Democracy” and Women

Political participation as the process by which individuals, acting by themselves or through group organization, attempt to influence decision-making or alter the manner in which power may be distributed and the principles by which it may be exercised in a particular society (Oguonu, 2002, p. 3), allowed considerations of female participation in Nigeria in particular to revolve around the parameters of “who vied for what office” and “who was elected”? Conceding that such parameters are necessary for Nigeria, one is of the opinion that if Nigerian women’s participation in politics continues to be measured on that basis, we may remain ignorant of the various ways through which Nigerian women are becoming more involved in politics and the changes that are gradually taking place in Nigeria’s body politic especially from the grassroots level up.

Grassroots politics which actually refer to political action at the village

⁴ “Women and politics in Nigeria” was the theme of a workshop organized by Nigeria’s Centre for Democratic Studies in May 1991. Also for two consecutive years - 2002 and 2003 - political process in Nigeria was discussed at the Fulbright Alumni Association’s national conferences. Retrieved from http://www.fulbright.org/conference/2005/FAAN_Brief.pdf

or ward level (i.e., communal level) gained currency in Nigeria in 1987 when a former military president, General Ibrahim Babangida, emphasized grassroots democracy as an integral part of his transition to civil-rule programme. In reality, political activity at the communal level had always existed in Nigeria. However, for General Babangida, emphasis on grassroots democracy was to build a broader mass participatory base than was previously the case during the first two republics: 1960 - 1966, and 1979 - 1983. The target groups for grassroots democracy were the politically marginalized groups –women and the poor (Okwuosa, 1996). The category “the poor” is used with reference to poor men as well as poor women. The encouragement for grassroots democracy was to extend political participation to all classes of the society and possibly to de-emphasize the connection between money and politics. In the previous republics (1960 - 1966, and 1979 - 1983) politics appeared to be the prerogative of the rich and influential, mostly men, and attention was centered on political activities at the upper levels of the political strata – the state and national levels. That state of affairs tended mostly to marginalize from politics and government women, who in a very fundamental way did not enjoy all the social privileges of men irrespective of their education and financial positions. With grassroots democracy, the Ibrahim Babangida administration simply threw open the doors of politicking to whoever was interested in politics.

If marginalized people should be encouraged into politics, certain measures were necessary. Hence, the government tried to remove the social and economic obstacles hindering women and the poor from political participation. This was done by the establishment of the now defunct Directorate of Social Justice, Self Reliance and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and the Better Life Programme for Rural Women (Oyebade, 2002, pp. 141-142). Although these programmes, on the whole, did not achieve all their goals, they nonetheless brought about the establishment of facilities and infrastructural improvements in many rural areas; partly enhancing rural development and productivity and improving the well-being of women in particular.⁵

The campaign for grassroots democracy was successful among women.

⁵ Interview with Mrs. V. Onah.

Under the Ibrahim Babangida - led - transition programme, women participated in politics as a result of individual agency but women were also wooed by political parties for purposes of gaining official legitimacy from the government but also. At the lower level of the political strata, the communal level, women were not bogged down by the usual huge financial involvement that political participation in Nigeria often required. The direction, though, where their participation has been particularly obvious since 1999 has been in the area of voting, which has remained indeed one form of political exercise in which most citizens everywhere ever participate directly in (Edelman, 1985, p. 2).

There were various motivations for increased female voting in Nigeria since 1999. Already mentioned is the fact that political parties needing to win legitimacy wooed women into their memberships. Female party members naturally supported their party candidates with their votes. There was, more importantly, the awareness among women that they could chart their future by determining who rules them. This awareness built up from 1993 after that year's annulled elections when all classes of the society and all gender groups struggled together to dismantle oppressive military rule. There was also the anticipation for rewards that would benefit whole communities besides those anticipated by individuals. Dr. Abdulrahmann comments on this last development with regards to Bauchi State:

Things have moved very fast in the last few years with respect to women participating in politics. Previously, women had no hand at all in politics. Now they take part having realized that there is money in politics... Women are very much aware now of what is happening and know that they can get money and other things from politicians. It is even easier to get these things before they enter office. Male politicians know that a large number of their voters are women.⁶

Many women were believed to have voted in 2003; but, as important as voting may be, it does not always expand political agendas or control elected officials both in between elections and when there are no elections (Staudt, 1985, p. 205). Voting does not also imply a meaningful input

⁶ Interview with Dr. (Mrs.) F. Abdulrahmann.

from women that derives from women's life experiences, which are distinct from those of the men. Many women would argue that besides merely voting, electing female office holders would best serve the interests of all gender groups as women are believed to be best suited to champion the wellbeing of the female folk. A Kenyan lady put it this way: "women know women's problems" (Abwunza, 1997, p. 205).

In Nigeria, presidential elections are the main events of extended electoral exercises, involving voting to fill the bicameral national assembly, the 36 state legislatures, and the corresponding governorship positions required by the country's federal system (Sklar, Onwudiwe, & Kew, 2006, p. 100). So far, impressive female turn-out at voting sites beginning from December 1990 has not increased women's access to high political offices. In other words, Nigerian women have not strikingly infiltrated the state and national levels of the political strata. The results of the governorship and State Assembly elections since 1991 clearly illustrate this. No female governor emerged in 1991. Only 25 women succeeded in being elected into the state Houses of Assembly from a total of 1172 available positions nationwide. In July 1992, out of 91 senators, 1 was female. Meanwhile only 12 out of 593 vacancies in the federal House of Representatives were filled by women (Okwuosa, 1996, p. 112). The result of the 1999 elections that commenced Nigeria's third Republic followed previously established pattern: 20.78% of the elected political offices were won by women. In spite of this low record, the result is nonetheless an improvement on previous ones.

Factors that for long have been impediments to women were identified to include: anti-women – pro-men postcolonial social values causing apathy in women towards holding public office; lack of secure financial base for funding political campaigns; lack of support, acceptance and encouragement from male politicians and other men; poor media coverage of female politicians, women's half-hearted support for female politicians, poor education, and ethno-religious chauvinism (Vogt, 1996; Pereira, 2003). Extraneous party policies that favour male candidates over female candidates has since 1999 been a major factor, often responsible for female aspirants either being disqualified at party primaries from contesting or being out rightly asked to step down for a male rival. Pereira (2003, pp. 291-314) has discussed this "patriarchalization of governance" as deriving from prolonged military rule. Some of these factors have been shown to have psychological impacts that cause women

to settle into a supportive role in the political playing field (Vogt, 1996, p. 16). More women would rather operate at the lower level of the political strata restricting themselves to the sphere of local government administration than venturing higher up the scale because difficulties to their politicking at the lower level appear minimized. Incidentally a significant number of women emerged in 2003 to contest for various state legislatures but very few made it beyond their party primaries and eventually into the targeted legislatures.

Grassroots political participation, no doubt, offers certain advantages for women. In the first instance, it does not require much expenditure; secondly, it does not require the participants being so well educated, thereby accommodating uneducated women and women of differing educational levels; thirdly, it poses little or no challenge to men (including husbands, relatives, and acquaintances) whose wishes and feelings may matter to the women; fourthly, there is little at this level that contravenes gender-sensitive social norms since in a way participation at this level can be said to be within the domestic sphere (the zone of operation of women) as against the public (consider the state and national levels); and, fifthly, it is not a serious threat to male right of domination, which is the crux of this whole problem. While anticipating improvements generally in Nigeria's political experience, this state of affairs nonetheless can rightly be said to prolong the status quo of gender difference in Nigeria's political and governance structure.

Demands for Women's Inclusion

As early as January 2003, and three months to the national elections, women in Anambra State in Nigeria's southeast geopolitical zone publicly announced their preference for a female deputy governor, with a public declaration that they would not give their vote to any governorship candidate whose running-mate was not a woman. Large billboards with this information were mounted on major highways in the state. Two months later, on March 2003, Nigeria's Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development, Aisha Ismaila, announced in a press conference marking the year's International Women's Day that "Nigerian women would ensure that each political party fields a woman as a running-mate in the presidential elections."⁷ Women's protestations fell within the

broad range of political action (Freeman, 1975), the significance lying in their demand for a change of a status quo that until then disfavoured them. As already shown, Nigeria has had no record of a female deputy governor –elected or appointed, a female governor, or a female vice-president. But, in spite of the women's threats majority of the political parties contesting for offices in the 36 states of the federation and at the federal level made no attempts to field female candidates as either gubernatorial or presidential running-mates. One notable exception was the Alliance for Democracy (AD), which fielded a female deputy governor and which won the governorship election in Lagos State. On the whole, very few women were chosen by their parties to run for legislative positions, majority of the female candidates being disqualified at the party primaries.

The five prominent parties out of the thirty that took part in the 2003 elections were the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), the United Nigerian Peoples Party (UNPP) and the Progressive Action Congress (PAC) of Sarah Jibril, one of two female presidential candidates of that year. These parties had, at least, a couple of things in common: they had active women's wings and they made extensive use of their female members in contesting for elected offices. They, nonetheless, differed in their objectives, programmes and in the promises they made to Nigerians while seeking for political power. The PDP sought re-election with the claim that it would, among other things, revive the economy and eradicate poverty. APGA promised to salvage Nigeria from the political decadence into which the ruling PDP had plunged it, and, to foster peace and unity in Nigeria. The UNPP told Nigerians that in exchange for their votes, it would improve the living conditions of the people by paying workers salary, maintaining roads, upholding free education and ensuring availability of water in the country. Both APGA and ANPP further promised to deal with corruption, which was given a new lease under the regime of the PDP. Although these pledges reveal the multifarious afflictions of the country, which would need the combined forces of all gender groups to address, they did not embody the popular democratic aspirations of women for representation at key political levels. Male dominance of Nigeria's politics

⁷ Daily Independent Newspaper, March 11, 2003, p.1.

notwithstanding, women's public demands are indications of the desire for greater female political involvement.

Lessons for Female Political Participation from the 2003 Elections

The contest between thirty political parties for similar offices made the 2003 campaigns and elections unique in some respects. It was considerably tough for the parties and their candidates and confusing for the electorate, especially those in the rural areas. Many rural residents and some in the urban areas were ignorant of the symbols of all thirty parties, the voting processes, the dates and functions of the levels of government that voters would be voting for, and, voters' rights and responsibilities during the elections.⁸ Campaigns were poorly executed in the rural areas in particular thus generating some of the confusions mentioned. A number of civil rights groups believed that the PDP-led government and politicians deliberately kept the electorate ignorant of the electoral processes in order to perpetrate electoral fraud.⁹ In spite of the sloppy management of the elections, there was an obvious trend in the campaign strategies of the major parties. Desperate to succeed at the polls, they fully utilized all human resources at their disposal for campaigns and related activities. No gender group was marginalized. The growing female political awareness also made women to actively support their parties, being responsible for the part they played both during the campaigns and the elections.

The PDP will be used for illustration because of its appeal across the nation and the wealth of information on its activities. There was little discrimination in the duties the PDP party leadership, at the state and local government levels, assigned to male and female members. The women's wing of the PDP in all the states, like the men's arm, was responsible for increasing party membership and maintaining peace and order within the party. Prior to the commencement of the campaigns, the PDP organized enlightenment exercises to encourage female members to exercise their franchise and to participate in membership drives. To realize

⁸ *Vanguard Newspaper*, March 24, 2003, p. 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

the goal of increasing party membership, women executives urged their female members to woo persons around them - friends, neighbours or relations - to join the party or to vote it in for a second term.

An aggressive campaign was mounted at all levels of the society by individuals wishing to increase PDP party membership, resulting in many cases of inter-party switches that favoured the PDP. Attracting more members was indispensable to the PDP's goal of winning the elections and "commanding a clear majority in the National Assembly,"¹⁰ which was the expectation of the party leadership. They worked with the understanding that their number would largely determine the amount of votes they would generate from within the party and used this for their projections for success at the polls.

Women delegated responsibilities to themselves according to their social potentials. Each category of women, whether uneducated or educated, reached out to those members of the electorate that fell within the same social as well as educational level as themselves; all concentrating on their environments - either the cities or the rural areas. Women scouting for membership for their party and for female voters organized for the job, being well armed with incentives, if needed, for wooing their clients. Enticements for distribution to different categories of rural women, for instance, on a one-on-one basis were money - the amount set out according to social status, various food items, cosmetics and clothing (wrappers most especially).¹¹ The 2003 elections witnessed an unprecedented degree of the enthronement of the "Democracy of the Stomach:" what the Constitutional Rights Project (CRP), a non-governmental organization, called "Cash and Carry Party."¹² Economic hardship may well be blamed for making the populace vulnerable and almost eager to pledge their votes in exchange for sometimes negligible amounts of money and other "gifts".

Politicians contended with groups of rural women who sought for general, more embracing, incentives just as they wooed women at individual levels. Ahaba-Imenyi women in Isuikwuato in Abia State received the pledge of a maternity centre from a campaign team in exchange for their votes. A community in Bauchi State demanded that

¹⁰ Interview with Mrs. Obi Okeke.

¹¹ Interview with Mrs. D. Ojobe.

¹² *The Guardian Newspaper*, February 6, 2003, p. 18.

a campaign team clean their communal bore-holes and open learning centres where women would learn to read and write to acquire skills that would enhance their economic situations. Below is an extended report of the aspirations of female electorates from political candidates.

I was involved in the campaign for the governorship election in Bauchi State... We arranged where the campaign team would go and how to address the women. When you come out to campaign you do not require a speech but to appeal to their emotions, pointing out what the aspirant will do for them especially now that we know that our husbands cannot do everything. Meanwhile, we have many children and are forced to help out in the family... What the women are saying is: "How will this man (the aspirant) help us achieve some economic independence?"

You sit down and listen to the women talk about their problems and you try to solve those that could be addressed immediately...

We went with local government chairmen and some senators. They gave us funds to try to help out. We gave out during the campaigns sewing machines, grain processing machines (you know, we use a lot of corn and we need to remove a lot of chaff). We also gave out machines for making noodles and other incentives - salt, body creams, wrappers etc. Some husbands told us that their wives are in seclusion and cannot come out. We told them to come out with their wives and put them in the line and let them vote. We told the women that this was something we are doing to get our freedom: We can determine who goes there.

Sincerely, to tell you the truth, the women that came out to vote, if you saw the lines, were more than the men. You cannot believe that there were all these women.¹³

It is easier, women argue, to get politicians to meet tangible needs

¹³ Interview with Dr. (Mrs.) F. Abdulrahmann. Female seclusion is practised widely by Northern Nigerian Muslims. Women in seclusion do not engage in public activities and may not leave the family house during daylight hours unless in emergencies. How strict the observation depends on individuals and their economic circumstances.

while still seeking for mandate to be in government than afterwards. Politicians, on their part, fulfill some of their promises to women for the sake of mutual interdependence and to avoid being rebuffed when next they turn up to solicit for votes. It was observed, however, that women used what they received judiciously, “spending wisely and keeping records of expenditure.”¹⁴

Nigerian women would not be first in demanding concrete pre-election rewards for their communities from candidates vying for public office. From the mid 1970s, poor local and largely uneducated women of Indio Guaya, a swampy area of Ecuador, where government presence was lacking and basic amenities non-existent, decided to bring development to their swampy neighbourhood by pledging to vote into office politicians who would bring into the area one facility or the other that would enhance the people’s living condition (Moser, 1987, pp. 309-312). Exchanging votes for necessary amenities may be considered a more definite means of getting politicians in developing countries, where the virtues of accountability and transparency are often not displayed by public officers, to fulfill campaign promises.

The practice of wooing individual women to vote with financial or material gifts, extensively indulged in 2003, was not in all cases successful. Bauchi women present us with an example of different reactions to such manipulations:

Female campaign groups go house-to-house to tell fellow women which candidate they are campaigning for and why they should vote for him. The women can be very militant. Sometimes they quarrel with you for trying to change their minds.¹⁵

Still on the incorporation of women in campaigns and elections: In Enugu State where the PDP held sway, some seventeen women were chosen from each ward and given the pet-name “Umuada Chimaroke” –meaning in this context the special women of Chimaroke (Chimaroke was the incumbent state governor, seeking for re-election). Umuada Chimaroke were charged with organizing and supervising the elections.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Dr. Abdulrahmann speaking about reactions to some of the campaign teams she worked with.

The various groups of Umuada Chimaroke held meetings in their respective wards every fourth night to apprise themselves of current developments within the party and the progress being made with the on-going campaigns. On the strength of the periodic briefings, they mapped out their strategies and carried them through. They used both subtlety and force, where subtlety seemed ineffective, to induce people to vote for their party. Although most of these women were to work only during the campaigns and, therefore, outside the polling booths, many did extend their activities to voting centres working together with other sets of women who were chosen to act as electoral observers and party supervisors at the polling booths.

In the towns of Enugu-ezike and Eha-Amufu, both in Enugu State, female party members featured prominently at polling centres during the election on April 12, 2003 alongside male thugs and party security agents. These women were at the fore of the rough-handling of voters and attempts to prevent the electorate from voting rival candidates. PDP female party members commonly moved from line to line asking female voters which party they were voting for and barring from voting those who came out to support either the ANPP or the UNPP, two other rival parties. In Eha-Amufu, in particular, by the time the scenario had degenerated into a serious clash between members of the PDP and the UNPP with each group beating up its opponents, looting their business centres and burning down houses, the women had disappeared. One life was reported lost in the Eha-Amufu incident; while a similar clash in Enugu-ezike the same day between the PDP and the ANPP left four men dead, some wounded, and a few vehicles burnt. Another clash between the PDP and ANPP in Aba in Abia State also resulted in casualties.¹⁶ The level of success of grassroots women politicians can be judged from the outcry of the electorate of being intimidated and compelled into voting PDP. Women were the catalysts in the incidents that led to the inter-party clashes in Enugu-ezike and Eha-Amufu. They also were, as a result, considerably exposed to danger. Nigerian women had rarely shown such degree of aggression during elections since 1960.

Quite a number of politicians have acknowledged the political acumen and professionalism of these so-called poorly educated women. The women's social and political disadvantages, no doubt, lie in their lack of

¹⁶ Interviews with Mr. Ebicha and Mrs. Ojobe.

exposure and, perhaps, the education necessary for their refinement so that they themselves could politick more at the higher levels. However, a considerable number of male politicians – senators, legislators, and governors – have no fantastic educational qualification beyond a secondary school certificate, which is the minimum educational qualification for political office holders in Nigeria and which some grassroots women also have. In the case of men, they depend largely on their political god fathers to break through social and political barriers (Sklar, Onwudiwe, & Kew, 2003, p. 105; Umar, 2007). This form of mentoring, quite common in Nigeria – as patrimonial or god-father politics – tends towards gender exclusivity, not being as strongly extended to female politicians as it is to men. For female politicians, therefore, good education and a secure financial base are very important prerequisites.

As already mentioned, duties to female party members were assigned on consideration of their social abilities. Nevertheless, campaign teams of educated female party members at the higher levels of the political strata, depended on the assistance of their uneducated and not-so-well educated colleagues for successful visits to rural areas and operation among the grassroots. While the educated women decided on where to go and how to address the people, their uneducated colleagues saw to the coordination of the exercise at the grassroots level as well as the mobilization of the rural community to receive and listen to the visiting team. Dr Abdulrahmann notes: “The thing is that the uneducated women are the real politicians. They are the ones who run around with the men. We needed them. We were coming from the town but they are the ones who live in the place and know their own women. They are the ones who mobilized the women to come out.” It was not only female teams that depended on women at the grassroots during and after the campaigns. Male campaign teams also relied on these women and their executives to smoothen their way and to aid them in getting through to the electorate.

Women’s working together was profitable for all categories of female political actors. During the process of mapping out strategies for their political tasks and while taking stock afterwards of their performance, women talked among themselves. Each group listened to the other. The privileged women heard their less privileged sisters talk about their challenges some of which they solved immediately depending on the resources at their disposal like pledging the initial capital to procure

necessary equipment for starting small-scale projects, and sharing ideas on jobs these women could do or businesses they could embark on to enhance their financial wellbeing. These were in addition to the emphasis for female education and the need for the poorly educated to educate their children if not themselves.¹⁷ The less privileged, on the other hand, facilitated the satisfaction of the political tasks and ambitions of their privileged sisters. Reports from these meetings reached party executives and were relevant for organizational purposes. The PDP factored in these reports into its agenda in aid of rural and poor members, an agenda that fell within its slogan, “Dividends of Democracy.” The term was used in 2003 by the PDP leadership to eulogize the benefits to the nation of the new democratic project with the party in control. It was also used by PDP members to refer to rewards in the form of periodic gifts that members received for supporting the party. For instance, it was said of Bauchi State: “Now with the campaigns over, women still receive some gifts from party secretariats to tide them until their assistance is needed again.”¹⁸ Other than the small gifts, women executives receive “small contracts within their capacities” from politicians “so that they do not become redundant”¹⁹ pending the next election. Many rural women enjoyed being involved in the campaign and election exercises. Some confided to the author their sense of accomplishment from their participation. The roles women played in 2003 may not have differed too widely from their roles in previous elections. The significant change lies in the preponderance of women who took part in 2003 and the range of their activities, including undertaking tasks previously reserved for men. Although the Nigerian electoral commission provided no gender statistics on voting, eye witnesses reported a recognizable increase in the numbers of female voters in various states quite unlike pre-1999 elections.²⁰ The already cited remark by Dr. Abdulrahmann on this

¹⁷ Interview with Dr. (Mrs.) F. Abdulrahmann.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The official report of the 2007 presidential elections is reproduced below. It shows how lacking in details Nigerian election reports are, making it difficult for one to say with certainty the number of votes contributed by each gender group and the gender of the voters. Such details can be guessed from studying voters’ registration list. Unfortunately, voter registration lists for 1999 and 2003 have not been made available to the public. See, also, previous election results (1983 and 1993) in Gana (2003) and Gana and Egwu (2003). These earlier election results had more details with these indicators: State, Rank (by total votes), Votes Cast (for each party), Total

matter is one good example.

If political activity incorporates campaigning, voting and communal activity, one can say that Nigerian women featured to some reasonable degree in all during the 2003 elections. But, with respect to tangible results from those actions, their impact was not much felt. Women's demands for uncontested integration in that political process went unheeded rather whatever integration that occurred went in a manner and direction contrary to what women hoped for. However, for those who believe that they were integrated in their parties' political agenda for that election exercise, the following appear embedded in their experience:

- A desire for success led to the inter-dependence of men and women
- Men's acceptance and recognition of women as fellow assets contributed towards joint realization of the political agenda of their parties
- Women satisfactorily executed duties they assigned themselves or those assigned to them.
- All categories of women irrespective of their educational and financial status teamed up for the common good of the parties. By working together gaps between the educated and the uneducated, the city inhabitants and the rural inhabitants were narrowed thereby mutually reinforcing women's support for each other.
- Women took on new responsibilities and challenges acting as electoral organizers and supervisors.
- Individual contributions allowed women to develop on the social dexterity essential to political procedures and transactions.

(number of votes cast for each party in each State), and Percentage of Total (votes for each party in each State).

Preliminary Comments on the 2007 National Elections

Discourses on Nigeria's 2007 elections among politicians, the electorate and the media revolved around the split between President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar. The other major concern was President Obasanjo's determination to ensure the re-election of his party – the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and his hand picked candidates after his attempt to succeed himself in power for a third term failed.²¹ This resolve was executed to the detriment of female politicians within the PDP in particular, and generally of the opposition - comprising all other political parties. There was a ruthless sidelining of PDP female political contestants who were disallowed from contesting for political offices using various tactics especially the imposition of candidates chosen by the President himself. Party rules, changed a couple of years earlier, provided for direct presidential control of party officials and effective rigging of party congresses to ensure domination by the president's supporters (Sklar, Onwudiwe, & Kew, 2006, p. 110). The president's backing for certain candidates worked against female rival contenders. The climax in the power tussle between the President and his Vice, and indirectly between the PDP and other political parties, came in December 2006 when the President publicly announced that the forthcoming elections was a do or die affair for him, a remark that provoked widespread reaction and condemnation from the opposition and the electorate. It is as yet too early to make very conclusive comments on the progress of female political participation in Nigeria using as a basis of analysis the events of the 2007 elections especially since this aspect of this research has not been concluded. However, the issue that stands out clearly from the 2007 elections with regard to female political participation in Nigeria is that in the event of a power tussle (as well as when a nation is under a determined political ogre), the possibility of a resurgence of the patriarchalization of governance is high. One can tentatively say that the 2007 national elections did not particularly build on the lessons of the 2003 elections.

²¹ *Vanguard Newspaper*, January 30, 2007, and *This Day Newspaper*, January 28, 2007.

Conclusion

Political activity in 2003 commenced with demands for women's integration and eventual representation in government. This report has shown that there was not much definite evidence that these demands were satisfactorily satisfied by male political actors. It was clear that women did not strikingly engage with politics beyond the grassroots level even though an important quality of the 2003 exercise was the increase in the number of women who took part in the different activities that surrounded that event. On one hand the mere increase in the number of female participants was not completely a pleasurable development; but, on the other, it suggests that many more women are beginning to contribute to the political process. In this wise, one can assert that it presupposes the emergence, if carefully nurtured, of some degree of gender balance in Nigeria's political culture both at the realm of campaigning and voting and equally at the level of succession to political offices which will bring about integration into governance. But women as a group retain the responsibility to continue to press for greater stakes in politics and to utilize all available structures to earn additional political functions for themselves.

The 2003 election exercise was marred on the grounds of violence, manipulation of voters, adulteration of results of votes cast, and indifference to the expressed needs of the electorate: Notwithstanding, the same election exercise, as already pointed out, engaged quite a number of women in different ways in contrast with previous elections. The evidence of interdependence of women and men and therefore gender collaboration in the process should be strengthened; being one of very few practical qualities of that event. Nurturing healthier gender collaboration at all levels of Nigeria's political sphere would narrow the gap in the political performances of men and women for, in fact, citizenship rights accords Nigerian women, as it does men, full political participation at the local government, state and federal levels in addition to equal contribution in governance with men. The neglect of these markers of women's citizenship rights in the past four decades cast women as if not part of Nigeria's existing political process and thereby robbed that process of women's commitment to its success and further development.

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Appendix

The 2007 Presidential Election Published by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC)

Results for PRESIDENCY Presidential Elections		
Election Date: 21/04/2007		
Candidate	Party	No of Votes
UMARU MUSA YAR'DUA	PDP	247842271
MAJ. GEN. MUHAMMADU BUHARI(RTD) GCFR	ANPP	6607419
		2567798
ORJI UZOR KALU	PPA	608833
ATTAHIRU DALHATU BAFARAWA	DPP	289324
DIM CHUKWUEMEKA ODUMEGWU-OJUKWU	APGA	155947
CHIEF CHRISTOPHER PERE AJUWA	AD	89511
REV. CHRIS O. OKOTIE	FRESH	74049
DR. BRIMMY ASEKHARUAGBOM OLAGHERE	NPC	33771
CHIEF AMBROSE OWURU		28518
ARTHUR NWANKWO	PMP	24164
CHIEF EMMANUEL OSITA OKEREKE		22592
SIR LAWRENCE FAMA KINDE ADEDOYIN		22459
ALHAJI ALIYU HABU FARI	NDP	21974
GALTIMA BABOYI LIMAN	NNPP	21665
MAXI OKWU	CPP	14027
CHIEF SUNNY JOSEPH OKOGWU	RPN	13566
DR. IHEANYINCHUKWU GODSWILL NNAJI	BNPP	11705
DR. OSAGIE O. OBAYUWANA	NCP	8229
DR OLAPADE AGORO	NAC	5692
DR. AKPONE SOLOMON	NMDP	5666
PROF. ISA ODIDI	ND	5408
MAL. AMINU GARBARTI ABUBAKAR	NUP	4355
MAJ. DR. REV. MOJISOLA A. ADEKUNLE-OBASANJO(RTD)	MMN	4309

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http://www.inecnigeria.org/election/show_index_result