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## MUSLIM WOMEN AND THE NIGERIAN PARTY POLITICS<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

Women's participation in party politics in Nigeria has been largely marginal. This has led to the clamour for more involvement of women in political decisions and increased presence in political sphere. The objective of this paper is to examine the participation of Muslim women in the Nigerian party politics. Muslim women have made significant contributions in Nigerian society through their efforts in educational, economic, health, and humanitarian services i.e. playing a social responsibility role. Descriptive and analytical methods were adopted for this purpose. The study revealed that the involvement of Muslim women in party politics in Nigeria was impeded by cultural and religious bottlenecks and not lack of participation. It concluded that emphasis should be placed on the complementarity roles between men and women in order to suppress the intolerance often encounter by Muslim women in Nigeria party politics. Hence, there is a need for the existing political parties and most especially the ruling party to take advantage of the complementary differences in order to create balance in political decision-making.

**Keywords:** Muslim, women, party politics, Nigeria, religion, gender studies

### Introduction

Gender inequality is a pervasive global phenomenon, especially in the political circle. Several researchers have sought explanations for the low female participation in political systems. Some scholars searched for answers within societies' religious, cultural, and political systems.<sup>3</sup> They argued that patriarchal practices and understandings, especially those based on religious teachings, are seen as serious hindrances to women's access to political power. This obstacle often is

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- 2 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2nd International Interdisciplinary Conference on Gender Studies and the Status of Women, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, UK March 2020 with support from TETFund Nigeria.
- 3 Fatima Kassem Sbaity, Can Women Break through? Women in Municipalities: Lebanon in Comparative Perspective, *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 35, No. 4, 2012, pp. 233-255; Richard E. Matland, Enhancing Women's Political Participation: Legislative Recruitment and Electoral Systems, *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, Vol. 2, 2005, pp. 93-111; Pamela Paxton and Sheri Kunovich, Women's Political Representation: The Importance of Ideology, *Social Forces*, Vol. 82, No. 1, 2003, pp. 87-113.

seen as huge in countries where Islam is the dominant religion.<sup>4</sup> The present study examines the extent to which Muslim women participate in Nigeria party politics and to what extent cultural and religious values serve as hindrances.

Using descriptive and analytical approaches, this paper explores interactions between gender, politics, and religion. It also highlights how Nigeria Muslim women strategically engage in politics thereby further their participation in political decision-making in the country. It is important to note from the Islamic perspective there have been discussions as regards the extent to which a Muslim woman can participate in politics. One view holds that a woman cannot lead the State while contrary view holds that a woman may aspire to any position of the State without any restriction. However, in both views women's participation is never in doubt but the level of participation is what is called to question. This is because right from the early period of Prophet Muhammad's mission, women featured prominently in State affairs. Their involvement range from laying their lives for the cause of Islam to serving as special advisers to Muslim leaders.<sup>5</sup>

Previous scholarship has noted the importance of women participation in politics,<sup>6</sup> this paper argues that Nigerian Muslim women can be regarded as playing important role in political decision-making in Nigeria. By examining Muslim women, this present study uncovers examples of the Nigerian Muslim women's participation in the growth and development agenda which are of benefit to the whole country and not just Nigerian women.<sup>7</sup> Muslim women have not only made contributions to educational, health, and socio-cultural development of Nigeria but also to the political development of the country especially through their political mobilization of women in attempts to shift discourses to ones that

4 Richard E. Matland and Günemurat M. Tezcür, Women as Candidates: An Experimental Study in Turkey, *Politics and Gender*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2011, pp. 365-390.

5 For the detail about the discourse, see: Rafiu Ibrahim Adebayo, Muslim Women in Partisan Politics in Nigeria: The Reactions of the Traditional 'Ulama, *Al-Hikmah Journal of History and International Relations (AJHIR)*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2015, pp. 165-187. See also: Yahya Oyewole Imam, Leadership of Women in Islam: A Critique of Some Scholars and Medical Evidences, *Ado Journal of Religions*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2002, pp. 86-97; Ahmed Nafiu Arikewuyio, Islam, Women and Politics in Nigerian Context, *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies, (IJOURS)*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2019, pp. 21-34.

6 See: Jeanette Morehouse Mendez, and Tracy Osborn, Gender and the Perception of Knowledge in Political Discussion, *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 2, 2010, pp. 269-279; Damilola Taiye Agbalajobi, Women's Participation and the Political Process in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects, *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 2010, pp. 75-82; *Women, Quotas and Politics*, Drude Dahlerup (ed.), Routledge, 2013; Amina Mama, "Women in Politics", in: *Routledge Handbook of African Politics*, Nic Cheeseman, David M. Anderson, Andrea Scheibler (eds.), Routledge, 2013; Nadia E. Brown, Political Participation of Women of Color: An Intersectional Analysis, *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy*, Vol. 35, No. 4 2014; Hasan Basri, Sa'diyah El Adawiyah, and Wawan Hernawan, Women and Politics, *Opcion*, Vol. 35, No. 20, 2019, 343-58.

7 Emeka Emmanuel Okafor and Monica Ewomazino Akokuwebe, *Women and Leadership in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects. Developing Country Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 2011; Fatile Olufemi Jacob, Ighodalo Akhakpe, Chinyeaka Justine, and Chukwuemeka Okpo Oteh, Feminism and Political Participation in Nigeria: An Empirical Analysis, *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, Vol. 2, No. 7, 2012, pp. 1077-1092; Dominic Azuh and Matthew D Egharevba, Gender Discrimination and National Politics: The Nigerian Case, *Covenant University Journal of Politics and International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2014; Ada E. Odionye, Education as a Panacea to Women Active Participation in Nigerian Politics, *Journal of Education and Practice*, Vol. 7, No. 30, 2016, pp. 212-217; AbdulGafar Olawale Fahm, Muslim Women and Social Responsibility in Nigeria: Contributions of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), *Alternation Special Edition*, Vol. 19, 2017, pp. 175-191.

are more favourable to women and youths.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, Muslim women are becoming increasingly mobilized by the activities of predominantly secular NGOs, yet they desire to retain, reclaim, and reshape-rather than reject-their faith. In their employment and in their interactions with the legal system, the state, NGOs, and political and religious groups, they are changing state practices, views of women in the public sphere, and the nature of lived Islam itself.<sup>9</sup> The delicate nature of Muslim women's reform can be understood from the view which holds that women the world over are being prevented from engaging in politics.<sup>10</sup> Women's political leadership of any sort is a rarity and a career in politics rarer still. We have, however, begun to understand what it takes to create an enabling environment for women's political participation. Some of the questions being asked in order to engage women politically are how women can get political apprenticeship opportunities, how these opportunities translate into the pursuit of a political career, and how these pursuits then influence the kind of political platform women can advocate once in power.<sup>11</sup> It is, however, important to understand how Muslim women are not only negotiating their political apprenticeship opportunities despite socio-cultural and religious pressures but also involved in party politics. This also helps in providing a deeper understanding of how Muslim women influence and challenge stereotypes about Muslim women and probe the difficulties and possibilities women face as they work for positive socio-political change and to what extent are they working within Islamic context.<sup>12</sup> Much like few researchers who have focused on paths to power and political influence through examination of the role of women in politics from the early women's movement to the female politicians in power today,<sup>13</sup> this paper analyses the varied experiences of Muslim women as political actors to illustrate their contributions to party politics in Nigeria. The paper shall, therefore, proceed as follows; religion and party politics in Nigeria, the involvement of Muslim women in party politics, effects of Muslim women involvement in politics, challenges confronting Muslim women in party politics, and conclusion.

### **Religion and Party Politics in Nigeria**

Religion it is observed plays a significant role in the life of Nigerians. This is why there have been several works written on politics and religion in Nigeria.

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8 Ibidem.

9 Elora Shehabuddin, *Reshaping the Holy: Democracy, Development, and Muslim Women in Bangladesh*, Columbia University Press, 2008.

10 *Women in Politics: Gender, Power and Development*, Mariz Tadros (ed.), Feminisms and Development, Zed Books, 2014.

11 Ibidem.

12 *Muslim Women and Politics of Participation*, Mahnaz Afkhami and Erica Friedl (eds.), Syracuse University Press, 1997.

13 Julie Dolan, Melissa M. Deckman, and Michele L. Swers, *Women and Politics: Paths to Power and Political Influence*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019.

Many of the works focused on religion and its effect on politics in the country. They also identified the role of religion in the formation of political parties, political mobilization, political legitimacy and voting behaviour of the people in previous democratic experiments of the country.<sup>14</sup> It is believed that religion has been used in a negative manner in Nigerian politics. This is because it is seen in some quarters as an instrument of oppression and deceit. However, the relationship between religion and politics is a major variable within the Nigerian political system.<sup>15</sup>

There are three dominant religions in Nigeria; Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. Moreover, in these religions elements of political ideologies can be found. This is why it is opined that one cannot speak of religion and politics but rather a religiopolitical system.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation, Nigeria's wide religious landscape mirrors the recorded introduction of its northern part to Islam through the trans-Saharan trade and the accomplishment of Christian missionary endeavour in the southern parts. Aside from Christianity and Islam, Nigerians likewise belong to a range of different religious groups. The biggest of these is made up of followers of traditional religious practice, alluded to as African Traditional Religion (ATR), with the stipulation that local belief systems and practices contrast broadly, and that their subsumption under one term predominantly mirrors that these practices do not (yet) hold the status of world religions.<sup>17</sup>

Prior to Nigeria's independence in 1960, Nigeria had experienced different forms of party politics and representative governments from 1922, with the appearance of the Clifford constitution, which allowed the formation of the first political party in the nation, i.e. Nigerian National Democratic Party, NNDP, on June 24, 1923, by Herbert Macaulay. On this basis, different parties rose and this development can be said to be the foundation of party politics and, races into political posts, through different parties. At independence, Nigeria had three political groups and they all have candidates for various posts, but with a greater amount of ethnic implications. Furthermore, at the point when Nigeria achieved independence in 1960, it turned into a multi-religious state with both Christianity and Islam closely, though never exclusively, associated with very different social and geographic groups, and this was reflected somewhat in postcolonial politics.<sup>18</sup>

Islamic subjects have consistently had an interesting spot in the politics of

14 Hakeem Onapajo, Politics for God: Religion, Politics and Conflict in Democratic Nigeria, *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 9, 2012, pp. 42–66.

15 Oluwaseun Olowale Afolabi, The Role of Religion in Nigerian Politics and Its Sustainability for Political Development, *Net Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2015, pp. 42–49.

16 R. Deremi Abubakre, "Islam Nostrum for Religious Tolerance in Polity of a Multi-Religious State: The Nigerian Experience", in: *Religion, Peace and Unity in Nigeria*, J. O. Onaiyekan (ed.), NACS, 1984. Here cited from: Oluwaseun Olowale Afolabi, The Role of Religion in Nigerian Politics and Its Sustainability for Political Development, *Net Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2015, pp. 42–49.

17 Insa Nolte, Nathaniel Danjibo, and Abubakar Oladeji, "Religion, Politics and Governance in Nigeria", Working Paper 39, 2009.

18 Ibidem.

Nigeria, especially in northern Nigeria. For instance, both the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the prevailing northern party during the period 1952-1966, and its successor, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), and the first opposition, the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), and its successor, the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), claimed to speak to the agreement of the general public and the Muslim *Ummah* (community). Each attested that not to acknowledge this accord was, in reality, unorthodox and un-Islamic. In addition, from 1950 to 1983 there were essentially two political parties in most northern states (although during the periods of military rule parties were officially banned), the NPC/NPN and the NEPU/PRP. NEPU/PRP advocated the immediate adoption of a system of direct democracy with undiluted universal adult suffrage, including the enfranchisement of women, to replace the old traditional, class-based and hierarchical structures upon which the British had tried to build and which the NPC had protected, preserved, and expanded upon.<sup>19</sup>

It should be noted that the First Republic, with a portion of its defects, gave Nigerians the through and through freedom to pick their delegate at all degrees of government. Tragically, the military mediation and its chaperon political interregnum did not give a lot of space for the political parties to evolve naturally. A similar destiny pretty much fell on political parties in the Second and Third Republics. Nonetheless, the 1999 constitution that introduced the Fourth Republic tended to the issue of political parties. As indicated by Section 221 of the Nigeria 1999 constitution, "No association, other than a political party, shall canvass for votes for any candidate at any election or contribute to the funds of any political party or to the election expenses of any candidate at an election. Section 222 also states that "No association by whatever name called shall function as a party, unless: (a) the names and addresses of its national officers are registered with the Independent National Electoral Commission; (b) the membership of the association is open to every citizen of Nigeria irrespective of his place of origin, circumstance of birth, sex, religion or ethnic grouping; (c) a copy of its constitution is registered in the principal office of the Independent National Electoral Commission in such form as may be prescribed by the Independent National Electoral Commission; (d) any alteration in its registered constitution is also registered in the principal office of the Independent National Electoral Commission within thirty days of the making of such alteration; (e) the name of the association, its symbol or logo does not contain any ethnic or religious connotation or give the appearance that the activities of the association are confined to a part only of the geographical area of Nigeria; and (f) the headquarters of the association is situated in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Therefore, the issue of party politics must adhere to the spirit of the constitution.

At the coming of the Fourth Republic, three political parties, the Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Peoples Party (APP), and the Peoples' Democratic Party

19 Barbara J. Callaway, *Muslim Hausa Women in Nigeria: Tradition and Change*, Syracuse University Press, 1987.

(PDP). While the AD held influence in the Western part of the nation, the APP controlled a few states in the East and hardly any others in the North and the PDP had the lion's share control of states in the nation except the South Western part. In the build-up to the 2019 general election, the INEC stated that of the 89 political groups that approached it for enrollment as political parties, a whopping 68 qualified to be regarded as such. However, it should be noted that the majority of these political parties neither have structures nor funds to enable them to be seen as a national party.

### **Involvement of Muslim Women in Party Politics**

The marginalisation of women in politics started with the introduction of Islam in the eleventh century and was for all intents and purposes finished by the Fulani triumph of many northern states in the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> The British rule, enforced in the twentieth century, strengthened this pattern in southern Nigeria by barring women from having significant political roles. Post-independence Nigerian governments have endeavoured to turn around this circumstance by including women in a governmental position. However, this effort has neither addressed the requirement for sexual fairness of portrayal in government nor guaranteed stability through broadened distribution of power. Progressive but restricted move is being made, as more serious thought is given to the problem of eliminating the gender biases of the Nigerian political system.

It is observed that quite early in post-independent Nigeria, politicians such as Aminu Kano, the pioneer of both NEPU and PRP, made the place of women an early and essential worry of his political group. While during the 1950s and the 1960s he and fellow politician, Isa Wali, were for all intents and purposes alone in tending to this issue, by the late 1970s and 1980s this subject had become a part and parcel of the party agenda and was supported by a wide range of the party members. The PRP was basically the only major Nigerian party addressing the issue.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, in the late 1950s, Isa Wali composed a series of articles in the *Nigerian Citizen* which incited conversation and set the parameters of discussion in thinking about the fitting spot of women in the nation. Wali talked about the correct role of women in public spheres, expressing: "With respect to public life, there is nothing in Islam which keeps a woman from following any interest she wants. There is no unmistakable disallowance against her partaking in public administration, as Aisha, the Prophet's widow, illustrated..."<sup>22</sup>

Due to strong Muslim lobbying, Nigeria's first constitution after independence (1960) did not grant women the right to vote. Although the Eastern and Western regional governments extended this right to women but the NPC which

20 Barbara J. Callaway, Women and Political Participation in Kano City, *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1987, pp. 379–393.

21 Ibidem.

22 John Paden, *Religion and Political Culture in Kano*, University of California Press, 1973.

is the party in power strongly opposed the legislation. Especially in the northern part of the country extending the franchise to women was regarded as incongruent with the traditions and sentiments of major part of the country's population. Additionally, the low degree of formal training of women in the North was referred to by the government as an explanation not to stretch out the vote to them. Education in English for Muslim women in the North was for all intents and purposes nonexistent. It was suggested that the education of women must arrive at a far more prominent quality, and the quantity of appropriately learned women must be expanded to many times the present number before the vote would be valuable to the full advantage.<sup>23</sup>

In spite of the denial of the franchise to many Muslim women during the first few years of independence, many political parties had women wings. They served the function of an auxiliary. They were mostly appointed by the party leaders and the women themselves had little or no control over their own affairs. This is why only at intervals do the women have a single representative in the party's executive committee and mostly relied on the leadership for recruitment and finances. Moreover, the involvement of Muslim women in party politics at the early stage was limited to entertainment (chanting, singing, and dancing) at political rallies and because they could not vote, no particular program was created to take care of their interests. They were involved in demonstrations, rallies, and attracting voters. Because northern women (who were mostly Muslims) could not vote before the 1979 elections, their involvement was basically the attraction of the male voting population. Although parties like NEPU and later PRP showed concern for the role and social position of women in the public sphere, it was largely in education and not in encouraging women to organise other women for political activism.<sup>24</sup>

It was as a result of a military decree in 1976 that franchise was extended to many Muslim women and by 1980 many parties began to see the need for education for girls and women's right to vote. Many Muslim women were urged to register for vote which led to the situation of more women voting more than men in the 1979 elections, in the northern part of the country. This was the beginning of greater involvement of Muslim women in public affairs because by the time of Second Republic, Muslim women were appointed to public positions. In order to get women's votes, parties not only created women's wings but turned to women for membership and more control to the women in terms of leadership of the women's wings. In addition, to indicate the new status of women in political participation women leaders were given traditional titles reserved for women of strong character and personality such as *Magajiji* (speaks for women) legitimising their leadership of the women. Although the primary

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23 Barbara Callaway and Enid Schildkrout, "Law, Education and Social Change: Implications for Hausa Muslim Women in Nigeria," in: *The Women's Decade, 1975-1985*, Lynn Iglitzen (ed.), Santa Barbara, ABC Clio Press, 1985.

24 Barbara J. Callaway, *Muslim Hausa Women in Nigeria: Tradition and Change...*

activities of the women wing still continued in terms of generating support for the party's candidates, they gather more experience and recognition in party politics. This allowed some of the campaign promises to women to be achieved in terms of Girls' schools, women centers for adult literacy classes and women's appointment to public office. For instance, under the PRP government in Kano State, three women were appointed commissioners, one woman was appointed permanent secretary and one woman was appointed to each of the ten parastatal boards. This initiative motivated more Muslims girls to contemplate being appointed into public office. This invariably led to more and more Muslim women being educated and more entering into professional endeavours.<sup>25</sup>

The transition program of the military rulers toward the establishment of a civilian rule as the Third Republic included in its mandate organising and collating the views of Nigerians on their preferred future political arrangement. Hence, the guidelines for discussion included the roles of women, young people and labour, the system and forms of government as well as forms of representation.<sup>26</sup> Women in Nigeria (WIN), a research and advocacy organisation with branches in most states of the federation, was one of the associations that was commissioned to present the views of Nigerian women. In their presentation, they condemned the male bias of government across regimes, including military, parliamentary and presidential forms of government since independence in 1960. They opined that there was not much difference in the different forms of government when it comes to women's political participation.

Muslim women were also involved in the discussion workshops organised by WIN (e.g. at Zaria Center). Among the issues highlighted by the Muslim women as their vision of the Third Republic include just, responsible and responsive government; the rule of law and equality before the law; adequate facilities and procedures in legislative bodies for the protection of the interests of Muslim women; and women's representation at all legislative bodies proportionate to their population.

Furthermore, specific recommendations made by Muslim women were that women should know their rights in religion. Also, there is a need for rationalisation of the multiple legal systems to invalidate those sections that contradict the constitution. Therefore, by the Third Republic, Muslim women have started to stake claims to political leadership through reference to religious texts.<sup>27</sup> By 1988, quite a number of issues have come to dominate Muslim discourses on women. For instance, some popular Muslim personalities held opinions that good Muslim women can participate in political activity not only voting but being voted for.<sup>28</sup>

25 Barbara J. Callaway, *Women and Political Participation in Kano City...*

26 Charmaine Pereira, *Domesticating Women? Gender, Religion and the State in Nigeria under Colonial and Military Rule*, *African Identities*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2005, pp. 69–94.

27 Kole Ahmed Shettima, *Engendering Nigeria's Third Republic*, *African Studies Review*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 1995, pp. 61–98.

28 Charmaine Pereira, *Domesticating Women? Gender, Religion and the State in Nigeria under Colonial and Military Rule*, *African Identities*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2005, pp. 69–94.

In 1989, a Christian woman was elected as a local government councillor in Kano Metropolitan, a Muslim dominated area.<sup>29</sup> This led to more discussions on whether Muslim women could stand for office and participate in local campaigns and also to the conditions under which it is appropriate for them to do so.

In addition, prior to the release of the Babangida regime's transition programme, the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) had initiated a national debate on the role of Muslim women in politics. The association's tactics were to seek support from liberal but influential Muslim scholars and judges, whose views were later published in the first edition of FOMWAN's magazine, *The Muslim Woman*.<sup>30</sup> By the 1990s, the Muslim women association made a gigantic move towards systemic operation and alliance building with mainstream and mixed associations trying to widen the stage for tending to women's political and related concerns.<sup>31</sup> For instance, FOMWAN has collaborated with Muslim women organisations such as Muslim Sisters Organisation (MSO), and Jamiyyar Matan Arewa (JMA) in organising political meetings with the aim of establishing a framework for presenting an agenda for women's role in politics and democratic governance. This has also led to the formation of the Nigerian Women's Political Agenda which has as part of its aim the inclusion of women's needs and concerns in manifestos and future policies of any political party involved in the administration of the country.<sup>32</sup>

Following the International Conference on women in Beijing in 1995 which championed the effectiveness and enhancement of participation of women in politics in Nigeria and with the re-introduction of democracy in the Fourth Republic (began May 29, 1999, and has continued to date), Nigeria has witnessed about 51 percent of women involved in voting during elections.<sup>33</sup> This shows the high level of involvement in politics. However, women are still considered under-represented in both elective and appointive positions. This is because available statistics showed that women's overall political representation in the government of Nigeria is less than seven percent and that of Muslim women will be invariably slightly lesser.<sup>34</sup>

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29 Ibidem.

30 Ayesha M. Imam, "Politics, Islam and Women in Kano, Northern Nigeria," in: *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective*, V. Moghadam (ed.), Boulder, Westview Press, 1993.

31 B. Yusuf, *Gender, Islam and Muslim Women's Political Activism in Northern States*, Kano, 1997.

32 Ibidem.

33 Oluoyemi Oloyede, "Monitoring Participation of Women in Politics in Nigeria", National Bureau of Statistics, NBS, Abuja, Nigeria, 2015.

34 Ibidem.

**Table 1. Women and geopolitical zone representation: The Senate (2019)**

<i>Geo-political zone</i>	<i>Number of available seats</i>	<i>Number of seats occupied by women</i>	<i>Number of seats occupied by Muslim women</i>
North Central	19	0	0
North West	21	0	0
North East	18	1	1
<b>Northern</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
South South	18	2	0
South West	18	1	0
South East	15	2	0
<b>Southern</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>

Source: author

**Table 2. Women Representation in the Senate (1999-2019)**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male %</i>	<i>Female %</i>
1999	106	3	109	97.2	2.8
2003	105	4	109	96.3	3.7
2007	100	9	109	91.7	8.3
2011	102	7	109	93.6	6.4
2015	102	7	109	93.6	6.4
2019	103	6	109	94.0	6.0

Source: author

**Table 3. Women and geopolitical zone representation: Federal House of Representatives (2019)**

<i>Geo-political zone</i>	<i>Number of available seats</i>	<i>Number of seats occupied by women</i>	<i>Number of seats occupied by Muslim women</i>
<b>Northern Region</b>			
<b>Northern</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>4</b>	0
North Central	51	1	0
North West	92	0	0
North East	48	3	3
<b>Southern Region</b>			
<b>Southern</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>8</b>	0
South South	55	1	0
South West	71	4	0
South East	43	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>

Source: author

**Table 4. Women Representation in the Federal House of Representatives (1999-2019)**

Year	Male	Female	Total	Male %	Female %
1999	348	12	360	96.67	3.33
2003	339	21	360	94.17	5.83
2007	335	25	360	93.06	6.94
2011	334	26	360	92.78	7.22
2015	338	22	360	93.89	6.11
2019	348	12	360	96.67	3.33

Source: author

**Table 5. Trends of Women and Muslim Women Deputy Governors in Nigeria Since 1999**

Election Year	No. of Women Deputy Governors	No. of Muslim Women Deputy Governors
1999	1	0
2003	2	1
2007	6	0
2011	3	0
2015	6	1
2019	4	2

Source: author

### Effects of Muslim Women involvement in Politics

Due to the high level of women involvement in partisan politics, Nigeria since the beginning of the fourth republic has been experiencing an increasing number of Muslim women becoming executive members of political parties, state commissioners, state houses of assembly, ministers, and members of the national assembly. So, it is not only in the executive arm of government that the increase is being witnessed but also in the legislative arm. In other words, women are being considered for position than in the past two or three decades.<sup>35</sup>

One of the effects of more women involvement in partisan politics is that it

<sup>35</sup> The number of women elected to public offices in Nigeria did not increase in 2019 election. For a detailed discussion, see: Ebuka Onyeji "UPDATED: 2019 elections worst for Nigerian women in nearly two decades, analyses show", *Premium Times Nigeria online news*, April 24, 2019.

is giving credence to females getting more engaged with politics. For instance, in 2016, a 25-year-old Muslim female became a local government chairperson. Hindatu Umar was appointed the Chairperson of Argungu Local Government Council, Kebbi State following the expiration of the former Chairman's tenure. Also, the country is currently witnessing lesser seclusion of women in the society, this is because when women are joining the system, they must see the people they look like and the more they see people of the same gender getting involved in partisan politics the more interested they become. They participate in politics and are involved in sharing positions.

Despite the fact that Muslim women can be seen contesting and been appointed into virtually all positions at various levels of government, from local government chairpersons to presidential seat, they have remained underrepresented in politics. Among the few who have had the opportunity of contesting the seat of Governor in Taraba and Kwara State respectively are Aisha Jummai Alhassan – aka Mama Taraba - (2015 election), Gbemisola Ruqayyah Saraki (2011 election). Muslim women who have been appointed Ministers include Amina J. Mohammed, Aisha Abubakar, Zainab Ahmed, Halima Tayo Alao, Salamatu Hus-saini Suleiman, Aishat Ismail, etc. A recent development in the Kwara State politics where the number of women appointed as commissioners is more than that of men. The Kwara State Governor names nine women among the 16 commissioners of the State.<sup>36</sup> Also, currently, a Muslim woman is the Deputy Governor in Kaduna State and some of the Federal ministers are Muslim women e.g. Zainab Ahmed (Kaduna), Sadiya Farouq (Zamfara), Amb. Maryam Yalwaji Katagum (Bau-chi), Gbemi Saraki (Kwara), Ramatu Tijani (Kogi).

Another effect of Muslim women involvement in partisan politics can be seen from the socio-economic angle. As a result of their involvement policies that are more closely related to the welfare of women, children, and family are often addressed by them. According to one of the female respondents: "...especially in terms of women empowerment, we do address women empowerment. It is because of the involvement of women that we identify that there are lot of poverty among women. Because most women taking care of the responsibility that men are suppose to take care at home, in terms of paying school fees, feeding at home. All these things most women carry these on their shoulders that is the reason you won't hear any men empowerment. You can easily hear youth empowerment or women empowerment. We didn't do anything men empowerment. It is because of the involvement of women in politics that is why we are able to achieve that"<sup>37</sup>.

Some Muslim women see their religion as serving as a guide in the manner

36 Kunle Sanni, "Kwara governor names nine women among 16 commissioner-nominees", *Premium Times*, October 22, 2019, available at: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/north-central/359034-kwara-governor-names-nine-women-among-16-commissioner-nominees.html>, (date accessed 9.9.2020). See also: Abdulrazaq Hamzat, "Understanding the 56% women cabinet in Kwara", *PM news Nigeria online*, October 24, 2019,

37 An interview conducted with one of the respondent (R4) on February 9, 2020.

they are to approach their political careers. According to one of our female respondents, politics generally is about service and Islam encourages service. She observed further that: "...your relationship with your fellow human being and what you can do to better the lot of others. That is what Islam is all about. And as a Muslim woman, this reflects more in your activity and that is why most men doesn't like [sic]...because you will not want to do what is against the tenets of religion and I am sorry to say the religion is secondary when it comes to politician, men politician, religion issue is secondary to them".<sup>38</sup>

Another reason for the increasing number of Muslim women in partisan politics is because position sharing is oftentimes based on zoning in most political parties, this therefore, increases the chances of Muslim women being chosen especially in areas where there is large Muslim population. Furthermore, with the increasing number of Muslim women becoming more literate and professionals in their chosen careers, this has helped in giving them the opportunity to be elected or appointed into positions often associated with men. This is why more young Muslim girls are involved in Western Education in order to increase their chances in politics.

### Challenges Confronting Muslim Women in Party Politics

Different challenges have been identified in various studies on women and politics as inhibiting women's political participation. Some of these are vulnerability, fear of internal ostracism, and male dominance, stigmatization, low level of education, meeting schedules, financing, political violence, religious and cultural barriers.<sup>39</sup> These points can be seen in the views of the respondents:

- The challenges we are facing are men. Our men don't want you woman to come out and achieve...<sup>40</sup>
- I think we are inhibited majorly by religious and cultural norms. ...we are rather valued as voters rather than people that should be voted for.<sup>41</sup>
- Some men do not allow their wives to participate in politics, it is not because of anything, it is because it involves time and it involves women going out

38 An interview conducted with one of the respondent (R3) on February 9, 2020.

39 Many of these points were highlighted in: Tolulope Adeogun, "Nigerian Women in Peace-Building Processes and Its Implications on State Building," in: *Reflections on Politics, Governance and Economy in Contemporary Nigeria*, Ibadan University Press, 2016, pp. 247–267. See also: Abidemi Abiola Isola, "Party Politics, Electoral Administration and Women Political Participation in Nigeria," in: *Reflections on Politics, Governance and Economy in Contemporary Nigeria*, Dhikru Adewale Yagboyaju (ed.), Ibadan University Press, 2016, pp. 199–227; Vasundhara Mohon, *Political Participation of Muslim Women in India*, Institute of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, Mumbai, 2009; Oluyemi Oloyede, "Monitoring Participation of Women in Politics in Nigeria", National Bureau of Statistics, NBS, Abuja, Nigeria, 2015; Glory Nneka Ukwenga, "Political Apathy and Mobilisation of Women for Democratic Governance in Nigeria," in: *Reflections on Politics, Governance and Economy in Contemporary Nigeria*, Dhikru Adewale Yagboyaju (ed.), Ibadan University Press, 2016, pp. 229–246; Khurshed Wadia, "Women from Muslim Communities in Britain: Political and Civic Activism in the 9/11 Era," in: *Muslims and Political Participation in Britain*, Timothy Peace (ed.), Routledge, 2015, pp. 101–118.

40 An interview conducted with one of the respondent (R2) on February 4, 2020.

41 An interview conducted with one of the respondent (R3) on February 9, 2020.

of the house often and at times that may not be convenient.<sup>42</sup>

- ...why are women not much in politics? The reason being that the men are hostile to us on the political fields, they don't like us to hold positions. And the reason is not far-fetched it is just because they don't find it easy to get us manipulated. Politics of men is about manipulation and you cannot easily manipulate women. You can only play your cards straight the women will follow... so their position is that women are difficult...so they resist supporting women.<sup>43</sup>

- ...is the issue of finance. You know we cannot women don't play around with money, even if you have, we find it difficult to play around because politics in Nigeria is like a game or anywhere is a game but in a situation whereby you know that you as a stakeholder your stake is so loose compared to men to put in your money becomes a problem. Secondly, not many women have the capital base to run for elections. If you say you want to go to bank what do you have as collateral to take loan and if you have a collateral in a situation where your success is not guaranteed is not is not your effort will not be judged according to your capability you will find it difficult to take that type of stake.<sup>44</sup>

- ...but when we are talking about ordinary female politician, the some women that are illiterate they are not holding any positions, they are maybe association leaders, association members, their lives in politics need to be addressed. Because I want to encourage them so that they will face their business, their children because it is not good to leave your home without something significant. It is not good to leave your home, your children without something significant maybe I will be able to get 1,000 because of the poverty in our State *sha*. If not because of poverty in our State and if the husband is a responsible man none of the women will be roaming about participating in politics without concrete reason. So we have problem in that and I can see a number of women, Muslim women, are so many in that side. They are illiterate, they not holding any positions but they still want to involve in politics because of poverty because of poverty maybe they will see little money to take care of their houses because of irresponsible of the husband. So we need to talk to our husbands to be more responsible at home so that their wives would not be roaming about participating on no reason in politics.<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper assessed the position of Muslim women in Nigerian party politics and the extent to which they are involved in political participation and decision making in the public sphere. It found that despite the religious and cultural bar-

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42 Ibidem.

43 Ibidem.

44 Ibidem.

45 An interview conducted with one of the respondent (R4) on February 9, 2020.

riers Muslim women can be seen as willing to participate in party politics in the country. The paper traced the evolution of Muslim women involvement in party politics during the first, second, third, and fourth republic and how the nature of Muslim women's participation has changed over time. The paper also explained the effects of their engagement with party politics and how this is broadening basic understandings about them and their proper role and place in society.

As a result of their engagement in party politics, the paper assessed the experiences of Muslim women in Nigeria and makes three contributions. First, it provides important data on the participation of Muslim women in Nigeria politics. Second, it demonstrated the extent to which Muslim women are challenging discriminatory socio-cultural and religious practices. Thirdly, it affirms that Muslim women who engaged in party politics are also making significant contributions to the progress of the society especially in bringing challenges of the youths and women to the fore and are willing participants in political decision-making rather than mere bystanders in the country's party politics. Hence, the paper suggests that emphasis should be placed on the complementary roles between men and women in order to reduce the narrow-mindedness often encounter by Muslim women from men in Nigeria party politics. The findings of this paper have policy implications for organisations involved in gender, politics and religion and open the way for further research in these areas within Nigeria's social, religious, and cultural context.

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## **МУСЛИМАНКЕ И НИГЕРИЈСКА ПАРТИЈСКА ПОЛИТИКА**

### **Сажетак**

Партиципација жена у партијској политици Нигерије углавном је маргинална. То је довело до потребе за већом партиципацијом жена у процесу доношења улога и повећавање њихове улоге у политичкој сфери. Циљ овог рада јесте да испита партиципацију муслиманки у нигеријској партијској политици. Муслиманке су дале значајан допринос развоју Нигерије кроз њихове напоре у пољима образовних, економских, здравствених и хуманитарних политика, где су играле веома одговорну улогу. У складу са тим, користимо се дескриптивним и аналитичким методама. Студија показује да је улога муслиманки у јавној сфери била под утицајем културних и верских образаца, а не мањком жеље за партиципацијом. У раду се закључује да би акценат морао бити стављен на комплементарност улога жена и мушкараца у циљу смањивања интолеранције са којом се сусрећу муслиманке у нигеријској политици. Стога, потребно је да постојеће политичке партије прихвате ову чињеницу и да створе балансиран процес доношења одлука у Нигерији.

**Кључне речи:** муслимани, жене, политичке партије, Нигерија, религија, студије рода

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