



Women's education and political participation

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Abstract

The paper empirically examined the relationship between education level and political participation of women. The indices of political participation include the following: membership of political party, voting in elections, occupation of political post, means of occupation of political post and level of occupation of political post. The results revealed that women of the South West region of Cameroon are fairly well exposed to formal education as only 4.1% of the sampled population had no formal education. The study revealed that the higher the level of women's formal education, the more their tendency to participate in politics in areas of voting in elections and occupation of political post either through elections or appointments at all levels of government. The study was guided by the following objectives; the first was to assess women's political participation and decision making. Secondly, what the opportunities of women political participation the third objectives was to determine the level of opportunities women's political participation and decision making. The researcher recommends that the government, civil society and women activists need to work towards sensitization and awareness creation among the community to realize the need of the Women to participate in politics and governance. The men need to realize the women's need for political power and change the way they look at the women and the government should embark on activities which support women's political x Initiatives. The researcher recommends these areas to be further studied including: a study that could analyzes the contribution of civil society organizations in promotion of women political participation and human rights, a study that could assess the policy gaps concerning gender equity in governance and politics for women empowerment and other study could be conducted in the field concerning implication of culture on women's political participation and decision making.

Keywords: women, education, political participation

Introduction

Politics is very important for many parties of human life. Mostly it is imperative for the existence of statehood and the way in which people interact-how they make decisions and settle disputes. Because people live groups in groups, there is a need to make decisions-about how power or available resources to the group are to be shared out for example or how conflicts which arise within the group are to be solved. The study of politics is the study of the how such decisions are made. It may also be the study of how such decisions should be made. Thus, we can define politics in two ways; first politics can be considered as the study of power and secondly as the study of the conflicts resolutions (Bentley, robson, grant, & robberts., 1995) [24]. To put in other words a modern philosopher, Michael Oakeshott, who was attracted by the original Greek roots of the word politiki, meaning the affairs of the state, defined politics as a merely organization of the running of the state (McNaughton, 2001) [29]. Politics relates the power struggle of the state. It is thus, concerned with power and the way in which power is distributed among the society (or groups). Political participation in fact matters in the life of every individual human being both men and women. Recognizing the essence of the political participation for every individual human being the United Nation (UN) exerted its human rights core instruments and recognized it as

a fundamental political right. In this study, the paper will focus on the women and political participation It is apparent that women are one of the politically marginalized social groups. They have no active role in the key positions within the bureaucracy. They have few political representations in parliament and cabinet. Although the equal participation of men and women in the political affairs and decisions making process of the country in all level.

Women's Education and Political Participation

Women's political participation: refers to women's ability to participate equally with men, at all stages, and in all aspects of political life and decision making process. It seems evident that formal education should be strongly associated with political participation for women and for men. Indeed, the American sociologists Burns, Schlozman and Verba assert, on the basis of decades of research into the factors influencing women and men's engagement with politics in the USA, that education is an 'especially powerful predictor of political participation' (2001:286). They identify a range of direct and indirect effects that formal education has upon political participation. Its direct effects include the acquisition of the knowledge and communication skills useful for public debate, and direct training in political analysis through courses with current events content. Its indirect effects are many and

include the benefits of voluntary engagement in school government, clubs, sports, and school newspapers; these arenas provide young people with an early apprenticeship for politics, where they can exercise leadership, develop civic skills of cooperation and negotiation, and acquire bureaucratic and organizational skills useful for political activity. Education enhances other factors supporting political engagement, such as access to high-income jobs that provide the resources and contacts for political activity, and access to non-political associations such as charitable organizations or religious establishments that can be a recruitment ground for political activity (ibid: 141-2).

In recent times, nations of the world have witnessed increased discussions and debates on gender issues with emphasis on women liberation, emancipation, empowerment, protection of women rights, and women participation in politics among others. In order to ensure women development in modern democracies, governments, world organizations and various stakeholders at different levels have made declarations that are supposed to be binding on member States among which include the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, which prohibit all forms of discriminations based on sex and ensure the right to life, liberty and security (UNDP, 2005).

There is a wide variation between countries, however, in the relationship between women's education levels and their representation in formal politics, and their participation in other political activity. The United States, which outranks other industrialized democracies in terms of the numbers of women in higher education (and in the work force, and in professional positions), has seen persistently low numbers of women in formal politics, reaching an all-time high of just 14.3% of Congress in 2002 (Center for Voting and Democracy, 2003). Uganda, Rwanda, and Mozambique, among the poorest countries in the world with female adult literacy levels of just 41, 60.2 and 28.7 percent respectively, have parliaments in which between 25 to 30 percent of legislators are women. This contrast suggests that the connection between education and engagement in formal representative politics is not directly observable, and invites us to explore the nature of the relationship between women's education and political participation. This is done by reviewing recent statistical analyses of the relationship between these factors and variations in women's participation in formal politics around the world. The paper ends with a consideration of the role of women's education in advancing their interests at the level of local government, which has seen rising numbers of women participants in countries around the world.

Political Participation

Political participation: refers the active involvement and engagement by individuals both women and men with political process that affect their lives. The act of active engagements includes voting, standing for office, joining of political party or to take part in the political campaigns of the political parties and to exert influence in the decision making process through public debate, and dialogue with the representatives they elected or through their capacity to organize themselves; or exercise public power by holding public office at different levels of administrations- local,

regional, national and international.

Political participation matters a great deal for women as a group and as individuals. Whether women work together to protest gender-based injustices or whether they participate in non-gender-specific associations and struggles, the most important group benefit from political participation is influence on decision-making to make public policies sensitive to the needs of the group in question. For groups, participation also builds social trust and capital, and provides a form of democratic apprenticeship; it offers socialization in the norms of reciprocity and cooperation, the capacity to gain broader perspectives on particular problems in order to develop a sense of the common good. For individuals, political participation builds civic skills, while successful lobbying can result in improvements in personal welfare and status. Explanations for the very slow progress women have made in gaining political office around the world have been multi-causal, including: their lack of time for politics due to their domestic obligations, their lack of socialization for politics, their lower social capital and weaker asset base than men owing to discrimination in schools and in the market, their under representation in the jobs that favor political careers, their marginalization within male-dominated parties, their inability to overcome male and incumbent bias in certain types of electoral systems (Randall, 1987; Matland and Taylor, 1997; Rule, 1981).

Women's political participation is most often measured in terms of the numbers of women to be found in formal politics, in positions of public office to which they have been elected. This extremely crude measure is made even more so by the tendency to limit it to the numbers of women in the main legislative house at the national level, excluding not just numbers of women in regional and local government, but numbers of women elected as magistrates, members of the boards of public bodies such as schools or health facilities, and the like. The reasons for using this measure have to do with simple convenience. There are significant data gaps on numbers of women in local governments and other sub-national elected bodies around the world, and there is such wide variation in governance systems for sub-national communities and public bodies that they are barely comparable. Numbers of women in representative politics are not the best indicator of the extent and intensity of women's political participation because there is no necessary relationship between the two. Relatively large numbers of women were found in politics in socialist countries in periods when women's independent civil society activity was suppressed under single-party governments (Molyneux, 1994) ^[18]. Relatively large numbers of women are found in local governments in some countries in spite of the fact that the women's movement can be weak at these levels – for instance in France or Uganda. And India and the USA, with the largest women's movements in the world (in terms of the sheer number and variety of women's organizations) have some of the lowest levels of women in national office.² Numbers of women active in women's organizations, or at least numbers of women's organizations in a country, might be a better indicator of levels of women's political participation.

Women's political participation is best understood more broadly than numbers of women in office, and indeed, more

broadly than numbers of women's organizations, as women may express their political interests through participation in a wide variety of political and civic associations. This definition includes voting, campaigning for a party or supporting party work through other means (e.g. policy development, membership drives), contacting policy-makers directly by writing or telephone, protest activities, getting involved in organizations that take a stand in politics, taking part in informal efforts to solve community problems, and serving in a voluntary capacity on local governing boards such as school or zoning boards. This definition is clearly culturally-specific; notions of citizen lobbying of representatives or participating in political campaigns apply best in democratic contexts that lack violence and corruption in political competition (particularly in electoral campaigns), and that have disciplined parties with internal democracy, clear programmes and positions. This narrow definition has also been criticized by feminist political scientists as being overly focused on individual political acts and for excluding the forms of public engagement favored by women.

A recent cross-national study (146 countries) found that the number of national women's political organisations was unrelated to gender inequality in political representation (Kenworthy and Malami, 1999). This is an indication of a pattern that appears in other studies of women's political participation: the longer women have had access to the political sphere, the greater are the numbers of women in politics – this suggests a role model effect that encourages women to enter political activity, as well as a cultural effect whereby the political sphere becomes less hostile to women the longer it is exposed to them.

One study that shows the depressive effect of corruption and political violence on women's political engagement, even in an electoral system that should favour women's engagement – a multi-member district. The difficulty with overly broad definitions of political participation is that activities are hard to measure, particularly acts of resistance in the private sphere, and cross-nationally comparable data are simply not available. Explorations and explanations of gender gaps in political activity in other cultures must be sensitive to differing opportunities available for political participation given variations in political institutions and cultures. Given the difficulties of measuring the quantity and nature of women's political participation cross-nationally, we fall back upon the number of women in office, currently the only consistent and comparable source of data showing variations in women's engagement in politics. Though far from an ideal indicator of levels of women's political engagement, it is not entirely unrelated to the question of women's relative political effectiveness in any particular country. The presence of more than average (currently the global average is about 15% of lower houses - IPU 2003) numbers of women in politics should indicate that some of the many obstacles to women's political participation have been overcome. Overcoming any of these obstacles is to some extent contingent upon the success of the women's movement or other civil and political associations in challenging the biases that differently select women and men into social, economic, and political institutions, and produce unequal and unjust treatment of women once they do gain access. Therefore the number of

women in office must at least *in part* reflect the strength and achievements of women's political activism. Attentiveness to the numbers of women in office is also not irrelevant to the project of ensuring that participation in the public arena to advance women's interests. Though women in office are almost always social and political elites lacking connections to the women's movement there is evidence from around the world that women legislators, even when in an acute minority, help to steer political debate in parties and legislatures to issues of significance to women and children (Lijphart, 1991; Rule and Hill, 1996; Mc Donagh, 2002; Thomas, 1994; Vega and Firestone, 1995; Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2001) ^[16, 5].

The right to political participation: refers to citizen's rights to seek to influence public affairs without any discrimination, to seek decisions collectively and to choose their own representatives organizations, to vote and be voted in elections, to exercise political powers such as legislative executive, judiciary and all other public administrative powers and to influence the formulation and implementation of policy at international, national, regional and local levels and have freedom of democratic action, free from interference.

Women in local politics and education

It is in efforts to increase the numbers of women participating in local politics that we see an influx of women to politics with significantly lower endowments than men in human and social capital and in material assets. Uganda's 1997 Local Government Act, which included provisions to ensure that 30% of local councils should be composed of women, initially stipulated that a minimum educational achievement of a secondary school completion certificate would be required of any candidate for local government office. Protests from the women's movement on the grounds that this would exclude most rural women from running for local office produced an amendment reducing the educational requirement to primary school completion. In India, the constitutional amendment that stipulated the reservation of one third of local government seats for women included no educational entry-point barriers at all. In these two countries the educational achievements of the large numbers of new female entrants to local government do tend to be significantly lower than that of their male colleagues (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2001:15; Kudva, 2003; Ahikire, 2003; Buch, 2000:12) ^[5, 1, 4], and indeed in India significant numbers of women local government councilors and chairpersons are not even literate. A sample of 1019 local councilors in three Indian states (843 of the sample were women) in a study by Nirmala Buch found that 51.9 % of the women were illiterate compared to 18.7% of the men, with a further 18.6% of the women claiming that they were literate but lacking even a primary qualification, compared to 13.1% of the men (Buch 2000:14) ^[4].

Quotas and reservations for women in national-level politics are generally enjoyed by women who have long been active in politics, have good contacts, elite family backgrounds, and differ little from elite male politicians in being highly educated and financially secure. Women's much lower educational endowment than men, their relative under-endowment in political skills acquired from party activity or civic engagement in traditional rural societies has understandably produced skepticism about their capacities to

govern effectively in these positions, let alone act in the interests of women in general. One observer sums up expectations about women in local government in India: 'The general opinion was that the majority of rural women, being illiterate, would be ignorant of the ways of manipulative politics; intricate financial procedures and "deals" and complicated development schemes and processes; that women would be constrained by social norms and customs and intimidated in the presence of elderly men and senior relatives. Women not having been used to equality and the exercise of rights would not be able to assert themselves or occupy positions in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. In both, journalists and researchers have produced conflicting reports about women's performance. Certainly many studies confirm the negative expectations articulated by Kaushik. Women councilors in India are seen as acting as surrogates for their husbands; in Maharashtra they are dubbed 'Proxy Pushpas' and in Uttar Pradesh, 'namesake members' (Kudva, 2003:452). Women new to office, even in the chairing position, are seen as subordinated to the Village Secretary (a government official who can often be the only literate person in the local office and therefore controls information and accounts). Women suffer harassment by male councilors (Mayaram, 1999; Mayaram and Pal, 1996) ^[14], and there are many instances of illiterate women unwittingly colluding in corrupt activities when manipulated into signing cheques or doctored accounts statements (Kudva, 2003).

Evidence has also been found to show that women in local councils, in spite of the formidable obstacles they face from hostile male colleagues and government servants, manage to influence local investments in public goods in ways that favor other women. In West Bengal when women are in control of local councils, there is a greater investment in drinking water facilities, biogas projects (for cooking gas) and labor-intensive public works projects employing women (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2001:19) ^[5]. Interestingly the West Bengal study showed that women-headed local councils spend less on informal education centers for children than do councils headed by men, and male council chairs express greater concern about teacher absenteeism in formal schools than do women chairs. The researchers suggest that the negative effect of women council leaders on children's educational investments by local councils is related to their own lack of education (ibid: 20).

What are the levels of opportunities women's political participation?

- Democratic principles and good governance gave women a role for the political participation.
- Educated women's have shown that they have the will and the capacity for leadership.
- The pressure of the Somali Civil Society and international community.
- Women empowerment and awareness programmers.
- Women see themselves as an important power as they are more than fifty percent of the Somali population.

In this part of the study the research question's which governed it was: What are the challenges facing women in political decision making?

- Women's decisions are ignored due to their minority in decision making positions
- Women have no full participation because of their low self-esteem.
- Women are lose their confidence and will, due to their lack of political experiences which are based on traditional way of living.
- Women are loyal for this reason men are not want to them. They opposed women to hold a public positions and if they hold they don't give support rather than resists.
- Since males are dominant, women lacked communications due to social stigma.
- Lack of support by the male members of the house of parliament and the council of elders
- The miss conception and miss perception among the elders about the roles of women in either house.
- The prevailing traditions and cultures which promote male dominance in decision making.
- Cultural tendencies to keep women to be submissive to the men.
- The lack of acceptance by men for women to be involved in politics of the country and belief that women do not deserve political positions and the irony that the women do not themselves have the political will much as they are not supported by fellow women and their counter party males.
- Additionally, "women lack the support in both of her two clans-birth and married clans"

How to empower women to participate in the policies and decision making process?

- The appreciation of women's political will and support from the families as well as the government.
- The proper conception and interpretation of the constitution and other legal policies relating to the rights of all the genders. Good and understanding from the community concerning the need of the women to participate in decision making and politics.
- Government's commitment towards creating a conducive environment for the inclusion of women in politics and decision making and the implementation of the both gender policy and political ambitions on the side of women to take up the leadership tasks.
- Empowerment of women to be at par with men, in terms of the capacity in order to use the rights and privilege due to them and make use of the good offices and gain access to and control of the available resources like in economic, social, political, religious and cultural fields to promote functional democracy, and true justice for advancement of women's interests for governance. Without active participation of women's perspectives at all level in decision making, and other political activities, the goals of equality and development cannot be achieved.
- A further implication is that women need to develop

among other things leadership skills, positive self-esteem and confidence, encourage and support one another, and develop strong assertive options, the building and strengthen solidarity among women through information, education and sensitization activities and advocacy at all levels to enable women to influence political, economic, social decisions, processes and systems are among the affirmative actions that need to be undertaken seriously by the government.

- It further implies the need for building a strong women's movement and civil society structures to raise awareness of the need to consider women's political initiatives and creating enabling environment that can influence the direction of politics and development in favour of women priority tailored towards their political and social needs.

Facts and figures: Leadership and political participation Women in parliaments

- Only 22.8 per cent of all national parliamentarians were women as of June 2016, a slow increase from 11.3 per cent in 1995.
- As of October 2017, 11 women are serving as Head of State and 12 are serving as Head of Government.
- Rwanda had the highest number of women parliamentarians worldwide. Women there have won 63.8 per cent of seats in the lower house.
- Globally, there are 38 States in which women account for less than 10 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses, as of June 2016, including 4 chambers with no women at all.

Across regions

- Wide variations remain in the average percentages of women parliamentarians in each region. As of June 2017, these were (single, lower and upper houses combined): Nordic countries, 41.7 per cent; Americas, 28.1 per cent; Europe including Nordic countries, 26.5 per cent; Europe excluding Nordic countries, 25.3 per cent; sub-Saharan Africa, 23.6 per cent; Asia, 19.4 per cent; Arab States, 17.4 per cent; and the Pacific, 17.4 per cent.

Other domains of government

- As of January 2017, only 18.3 per cent of government ministers were women; the most commonly held portfolio by women ministers is environment, natural resources, and energy, followed by social sectors, such as social affairs, education and the family.
- The global proportion of women elected to local government is currently unknown, constituting a major knowledge gap.
- Women's representation in local governments can make a difference. Research on *panchayats* (local councils) in India discovered that the number of drinking water projects in areas with women-led councils was 62 per cent higher than in those with men-led councils. In Norway, a direct causal relationship between the presence of women in municipal councils and childcare coverage was found.

Expanding participation

As of June 2017, only 2 countries have 50 per cent or more

women in parliament in single or lower houses: Rwanda with 61.3 per cent and Bolivia with 53.1 per cent; but a greater number of countries have reached 30 per cent or more. As of June 2017, 46 single or lower houses were composed of 30 per cent or more women, including 19 countries in Europe, 13 in Sub-Saharan Africa, 11 in Latin America have applied some form of quotas - either legislative candidate quotas or reserved seats - opening space for women's political participation in national parliaments. Gender balance in political participation and decision-making is the internationally agreed target set in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

There is established and growing evidence that women's leadership in political decision-making processes improves them. Women demonstrate political leadership by working across party lines through parliamentary women's caucuses - even in the most politically combative environments - and by championing issues of gender equality, such as the elimination of gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws and electoral reform.

Conclusions

This paper set out to review evidence about the relationship between women's education and political participation, with a view to assessing whether more education for women can be seen to shift their levels of engagement in politics. Ideally, higher levels of political participation by greater numbers of women should result in more attention to gender-equity in social and economic policy, and thus promote better lives for women generally. Given the evidence above, it is difficult to assert conclusively that more and better education makes women more active in politics. Indeed, in some countries the very opposite has been found, where educated, affluent women show indifference to politics or a high degree of cynicism as to the effectiveness of any kind of political engagement (CENWOR, 1994, cited in Jayaweera, 1997:421)^[9].

The ways in which women and men are differently selected into, and treated within, political institutions are strongly influenced by culture. Ironically, strong kinship and patronage-based systems may be able to accept greater numbers of women in politics on the grounds of their family status than can systems based upon individual merit that disguise male biases in political institutions. However, such systems will favor only elite women, and only in small numbers.

Perhaps what these inconclusive findings and observations show more than anything else is that political institutions may differ in some key respects from other social institutions in the ways that they select participants. Individual and group political skills and political resources are obviously enhanced by endowments of human capital (chief among them education) as well as material resources. But political skills and resources can come from other sources: charisma, social capital, and the right ideas at the right time can override the best education or the fattest campaign treasure chest and can enable a leader to mobilize followers and capture power. Anne Phillips (1991:78) has talked about the 'relative autonomy' of the political sphere in this respect -- although the political arena replicates class and gender biases in society, it can also

provide an arena for transgressing social conventions and for experimentation in which unlikely candidates – women, or men from socially excluded groups, men without education or capital – can occasionally rise to leadership positions or galvanize effective social movements.

The numbers of women who are successful in electoral contests in contexts lacking electoral systems that favor diversity or special measures promoting their candidacies (quotas and reservations) are still so very small that it is misleading to try to draw connections between their political success and broad social developments.

But, as we know, the number of women in formal politics is not the best measure of women's political participation. More systematic study of other types of political participation by women, such as voting behavior, lobbying activity, associational activity, and membership of political parties, is needed to illuminate the factors promoting higher rates of women's engagement in these activities. Cross-national comparative work on these features of political engagement is in its infancy, but these types of political participation are more likely to be more closely related to women's educational levels than is the number of legislative seats won by women.

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