

**THE INFLUNENCE OF PATRONAGE ON NON-LITERATE RURAL  
WOMEN**

**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Patronage in Nigerian politics is increasing at an alarming rate, particularly on non-literate rural women who are vulnerable and at the lowest rung of the development ladder. This paper relying on secondary source of data, textbooks, journals, books and internet sources explains the concept of who non-literate rural women are, their peculiar characteristics like poverty, strong family ties, religious inclination, inability to read and write as factors which politicians play on and thereby releases patronage to them. This paper concludes that patronage is making non-literate rural women to be perpetually poor, underdeveloped, and their rural areas to lack infrastructural facilities and social amenities and therefore, recommends amongst others that the government should functionally empower non-literate women through adult education, vocational training and release of start-up capital as well as ensuring that true democracy is practiced in the country.*

Key Words: Patronage, Non-literate, Rural women, Voting Behaviour.

**INTRODUCTION**

The discourse about the importance of women and the pivotal role they play in any state's developmental efforts cannot be overemphasized. This is more in view of the fact that the drive in the international system in the contemporary times is tilting towards sustainable development with the realization of the need to make women an integral focus in developmental issues and efforts. This is against the background of women constituting about half of the world population. For example in Nigeria,

women constitute 50 percent of the population and about 51 percent of voters (Ogbogu, 2012).

In Nigeria, majority of the poor and non-literate in urban and rural areas are majorly constituted by women (Ogunika and Ifah, 2004; Ogbogu, 2012 and Ayevbomwan et al, 2016). Women have been referred to as the endangered species to the extent that their productive roles are seen as part of their domestic roles (Egbogbara, 1990). As constituting the larger percentage of non-literate group in Nigeria, in view of the fact that there is preference

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for male over female education (Ogbogu, 2012; Ayevbomwan et al., 2016). They have also been noted to suffer neglect, domination, exploitation, suppression, subordination, impoverishment, marginalization, coercion, amongst others which make them highly vulnerable and unable to take independent decisions without external influence (Ani et al., 2004; Agishi, 2014; Onyebu, 2016 and Ayevbomwan et al., 2016 and Okpoko, 2018).

Voting is an integral part of any democratic political system. For democracy to thrive therefore, it is highly important that electorates enjoy the freedom to choose to vote for the candidates of their choice without fear, intimidation, coercion or extraneous influence. It is a thing of worry that women who constitute over 51 percent of the voters in Nigeria, with most of them living in the rural areas do not enjoy this opportunity (Ogbogu, 2012). Most especially, the non-literate who cannot read or write and therefore, lack education which has been credited to have the ability to enhance the derivation, decoding, and evaluation of useful information which electoral process including voting demands. Electorates are expected to be able to understand, comprehend, analyze and consequently take independent decisions on whom and/or what party to vote for. Education affords electorates the opportunity of a clear understanding of elections and the roles political parties are to play as well as the importance of party manifestoes (Agishi, 2014).

Most non-literate rural women cannot tap into these benefits of education in order for them to take independent decisions. They are also characterized by some factors that subject them to influence of patronage in their voting pattern. These factors open them up to extraneous influences that give direction to their expressions and actions as to who to vote for. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the factors that characterized non-literate rural women; reasons why patronage is able to influence non-literate rural women's voting behaviour and concludes by recommending measures that can assist in mitigating the influence of patronage on non-literate rural women voting behaviour

#### **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

##### **Patronage:**

This concept has enjoyed a number of definitions from different scholars and perspectives. According to Oxford Dictionary (2018), Patronage is the support given by a patron, the power to control appointment to others or the right to privileges, a patronizing or condescend. It is also opined to mean the support, encouragement, privilege, or financial aid that an organization or individual bestow to another, while Dictionary.com (2018) view patronage as a condescending manner or attitude in granting favours, in dealing with people etc. to Iwundu (2018) patronage is an acceptance of gratification from politicians to vote for them.

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To this extent, patronage is therefore, not an altruistic gesture but given to achieve a pre-determined objective or goal. It is condescending because it is granted in order to get something in return, most of the time given by a person at an advantaged position to a person who is disadvantaged. Most politicians in Nigeria use patronage to get votes from the vulnerable electorates. Patronage is therefore, conceived to be anything given or used by a politician in order to influence the voting behaviour of an electorate. It could be anything, factor, sentiments etc used to influence the decision of an electorate on who or what political party to vote for.

#### **Non-literate**

Non-literate from the perspective of the writer is conceived to be inability to read and write the Nigerian lingua franca i.e. English Language and also all other three (3) major languages spoken in Nigeria. By implication this refers to people that have not been to school, whether formally or informally (adult education) to learn how to read and write these languages. They are also otherwise referred to as illiterate.

#### **Rural Women**

These are women who are domiciled in the rural areas. They may be natives of these villages or simply living in such areas. Rural areas are characterized by lack of major social amenities and

infrastructural facilities. They are also inhabited by a relatively fewer number of people in comparison to towns and cities.

#### **Voting Behaviour**

A number of scholars have seen the concept, voting behaviour from different perspectives and most importantly what goes into it. Scholars opine that what constitutes voting behaviour transcends the electorates voting during election. Voting behaviour has been conceived as why people voted the way they did and the implications that could arise from such decisions and consequently, the results (ICPSR, 2018). To George-Genyi (2015) voting behaviour is voluntary or non-coercive involvement of citizens in politics of their country. Stressing further, he said that the socio-economic status of an electorate can influence his/her voting behaviour. According to George-Genyi (2015), religion, race, pre-conditioned political lineages and electoral cleavages have the capacity to determine who a voter votes for in an election. Iwundu (2018) in the same vein, observed that voting behaviour is basically decided by the electorate as to vote or not to vote and who to vote for in a election, to him, this can be influenced by socio-cultural, economic, political background amongst others. To Lazarsfield (1994) voting behaviour can be perceived from two perspectives i.e. psychological and social. Psychological theory of voting behaviour has to do with party affiliation,

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attitudes to candidates, voter psychological predisposition or attitude. It is believed that every electorate is a rational being and therefore, will take decisions based on critical analysis and personal decisions without external influence. The sociological perspective ascribes voting as being respondent to socio-economic factors, social class and location, occupation, religion, age, race, ethnicity, and family lineages. Voting behaviour from this perspective is highly influenced and dependent on the aforementioned factors and hence, plays a very dominating role on the electorate.

However, to Flanigan and Zingale (1998) voting behaviour is an all encompassing concept which include not only when a voter cast his/her vote but also voting procedure, orderliness during accreditation and voting, as well as counting of votes and announcement and acceptance of results. To Flanigan and Zingale (1998) mind, voting behaviour is all about the totality of election processes.

Voting behaviour therefore, transcends who electorates vote for or how they vote but also all the other factors like gifts, race, religion, ethnic group, socio-economic status, level of education, geographical location that influence or impinge on their voting pattern. These factors explain the 'why' of voting. It is about the reasons behind why an electorate will vote for candidate A and not B in a particular election.

**CHARACTERISTICS OF NON-LITERATE RURAL WOMEN THAT MAKE THEM SUSCEPTIBLE TO PATRONAGE**

Women generally have been noted to be faced with a number of challenges in comparison to their men counterparts. These challenges include social, cultural, economic, political, religious discriminations. These challenges become more accentuated in the rural areas and more importantly among the non-literate women. In order to have a broad perspective of why non-literate women vote along the pattern or line they do and the effect of patronage on such, there is a pertinent need to examine their peculiar characteristics.

Apart from the fact that they cannot read or write and that they live in the rural areas, this set of women are majorly involved in family business which foreclose their ability to have independent income. They are vulnerable to the extent that they work on their husbands' farm, participating actively in planting, tendering, harvesting, processing and marketing (Onyebu, 2016). Only few of them are involved in other vocations like trading, weaving etc. The input is low and consequently, the output is also low (Ani et al., 2004). Rural women lack the economic power because the services being rendered are seen as their own contribution to the home and therefore not remunerated. Thus, opens them to politicians who are ever ready to buy their votes and by giving them some monetary gifts or other things, they are thereby influenced into voting for them. A case in point is as reported during the 2018 July Ekiti state governorship election where the

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two major parties i.e. People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC) were alleged to have induced voters with cash and material gifts in order to vote for them. The incidence was tagged "see and buy". Hence, poverty can be said to have become a veritable tool being employed by Nigerian politicians to make electorates vote for them.

The inability of non-literate rural women to read and write is also making patronage to have an untold influence on their voting behaviour. This is to the extent that ability to read and write portends their knowing and having an understanding of the party manifestoes and programmes and therefore, thinking and vote rationally. Western education affords enlightened and informed decisions. It also encourages putting into practice what had been learnt, which to a great extent accelerates development objectives. It allows for a full understanding of political programmes, voting methods also the authority and power at the disposal of the electorate (Okpoko, 2018). Patronage thrives because politicians play on the ignorance of these set of people and are therefore, able to influence them with pittance (Ayokunle, 2011). They (non-literate rural women) are not able to alter or impact their environment through individual and group actions and give them the needed psychic mobility to be actively involved and not an 'object' in politics and governance (Okpoko, 2018).

Non-literate rural women also lack access to information. They are not exposed to news and happenings around the world and more importantly, Nigeria. In spite of the fact that the world has become a global village where information now travels faster than it was obtainable before. Most intellectual discussions on party manifestoes, credentials or personalities of aspirants, alternative choices available, as well as political and electoral education take place through the mass and the social media thereby, giving ample information to the electorate to make rational choices.

Information is power and it is believed that a number of human behaviours are precipitated on information available to such. Most rural areas are characterized by lack of facilities that aid information dissemination like electricity. More importantly, they are not allowed to sit with their husbands either at the village square or designated recreation areas where information are passed or shared. They are rather encumbered with the house chores and in most cases, for cultural reasons. Non-literate rural women are unable to participate in these rural arrangements where they can have the required information that would assist them in expressing their needs and participating in decision-making especially, as it affects who to vote for. More so, most aspirants do not go to the rural areas to campaign for electoral posts, they rather send their agents to them to release patronages in form of gifts and cash during or when elections are fast

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approaching in order to gain their vote and after winning such elections, they disappear to return when another election comes.

In addition, non-literate rural women, due to the migration of a number of men to the urban center to seek for white collar job or a better source of living, have made a lot of them to become bread winners and actively involved in the maintenance of family (Ogunmefun and Achike, 2015; Onyebu, 2016). Women generally and more so, rural ones are noted to most of the times even at the expense of their personal needs, put the welfare of the home first, thereby increasing enormously, their work loads and responsibilities (Ayevbuom Wam, 2016). Hence, any additional source of income through patronage released by politicians becomes a very welcomed idea.

Also, in spite of the level of development and the increasing call for equal treatment of men and women all over the world, the patriarchal influence still holds sway in most rural settings in Nigeria, where women are subordinated and do not have equality with men in decision-making. They are exposed to coercive controls by their husband and men are found to still make most of the very important decisions for and on behalf of the family, including who to vote for (Ibid, 2016). The voice of rural women, especially non-literate ones is most times not heard. They have to do the biddings of their husbands (who might have also been influenced by patronages) in instructing them on

who and who not to vote for. They are mostly ordered by their husbands as their opinion is not sought at all. They experience subordination, intimidation and do not enjoy an equal pedestal or platform with their husbands in decision-making and most importantly, the direction of their voting behaviour.

Religion, which is the opium of the people, has also been found as a platform on which patronage thrives among the non-literate rural women. Women have been found to be more religiously inclined and tend to hold their religious belief sacred and very important. Politicians in Nigeria are known to play on religious sentiments in order to gain sympathy and make electorates vote for them. Religion has been used as a divisive tool in Nigeria. This is evident among urban area dwellers who are expected to be cosmopolitan and broad minded and more so, among rural dwellers and consequently, non-literate women who tend not to have the ability to do comprehensive analysis devoid of religious sentiments.

Non-literate rural women's predilection towards strong ethnic cleavages has also been used as sources of patronage by politicians. At the micro level, ethnicity comes to the fore, membership of same villages, communities, compounds, family are presented to electorates as reasons to vote for politicians. Politicians are noted to engage ethnic sentiments because they know that rural dwellers are more prone to holding allusion to primordial

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sentiments and they extol communal and family connections and relationships. It becomes easy therefore, to sell ethnic sentiments to non-literate rural women to vote for aspirants who hail from their villages, communal areas and families, as the case may be.

**EFFECTS OF PATRONAGE ON NON-LITERATE RURAL WOMEN**

Patronage, the way it is being used in politics in Nigeria, is an ill-wind that blows the masses no good. It is having untold effects on the disadvantaged who are used as pawn by politicians to achieve their aims. This on the long run, has grave negative effects on the recipient.

One major effect of patronage is keeping the people in abject poverty. After doling out whatever the politicians want to give the people, they go away not to return. The patronages offered are not always what can get the people out of poverty but to meet just their immediate needs. Hence, after exhausting whatever they had been given, they go back to “square one” and sometimes, worse off than before. Patronage may alleviate the immediate condition of the recipient but on the long run, it is like short-changing them because it does not lead to development (Ayokunle, 2011).

Secondly, patronage does not allow the politicians to be accountable to the people therefore, they cannot be called to question. A number of times, they do not present any

worthwhile manifestoes to the people on which they can be held accountable. Provision of infrastructural facilities and social amenities that could aid rural women in their vocation, household chores, health, their children education are therefore, not provided because the politicians do not feel responsible to them.

Thirdly, it is also having an exploitative effect on the rural women to the extent that they will remain subservient to the political gladiators who are re-cycling the political posts among themselves. It is a bane to the movement of these endangered species from the bottom to become part of the decision makers (Ayokunle, 2011; Haruna and Jumba, 2011).

**CONCLUSION**

Patronage in politics especially in Nigeria has become a veritable and important tool in the hands of politicians in influencing the voting behaviour of electorates and more importantly, the non-literate rural women who are most vulnerable in this regard. It has become a means through which the impoverished and disadvantaged poor gain access to the natural resources. The few political class plays on this and use it to gain the loyalty of the poor who are in the majority (Ayokunle, 2011).

One can safely say that the drift has gone from serious party manifestoes to “cash politics”. A number of non-literate rural women has been induced or influenced through patronages like money, gifts, food items, clothing materials, religion,

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ethnic cleavages etc. to vote along the line that politicians want. Votes now go to the highest bidder. Political aspirants are in the habit of using these influences (patronages) at their disposal to take advantage of this vulnerable group. These could be attributed to the inability of the successive governments in Nigeria to meet their obligated responsibilities to the people.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✚ The government must be totally committed to the provision of infrastructural facilities (electricity, good roads, pipe borne water) and social amenities (health centres) with special focus on the rural areas.
- ✚ The government must intensify efforts and make provision for empowerment programmes for the non-literate rural women. A number of such programmes had been put in place before but did not actually reach the target group. This is to increase their income generation and less susceptible to political money bags.
- ✚ Provisions for adult education should be made in the rural areas with high level governmental involvement. This will allow the women the ability to read and write and therefore enhance their ability to rational and analytical thinking.
- ✚ Political campaign should be taken to rural areas where aspirants will tell the people their programme of action and manifestoes

in the language that they understand. National Orientation Agency (NOA) should also be empowered to be alive to its responsibilities.

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