

ASSESSMENT OF FEMALE MUSLIM INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS AND ITS IMPLICATION TO MORALITY IN NORTH-WESTERN NIGERIA

Ainau Tankonmama

Department of Islamic Studies,
Federal University of Education, Zaria

Ainautankonmama@Gmail.Com

Professor Muhammad Yahya (Mujahid)

yahyamujahid3@gmail.com

Dr. Danyaro Abdullahi

abdullahidanyaro1@gmail.com

Dr. Lawal Tambaya Ahmad

lawaltambayaahmad@gmail.com

Abstract

This study assesses the involvement of female Muslims in politics and its implications for morality in North Western Nigeria. The increasing participation of women in political processes, such as voting, campaigning, holding public office and engaging in political discourse has generated diverse perspectives within Muslim communities, particularly concerning its alignment with Islamic moral values and socio-cultural norms. The study adopts qualitative approach. The findings reveal that while female political participation has contributed positively to inclusive governance, advocacy for social welfare and the representation of women's interest, it also raises concern regarding challenges to moral conduct, including issues of modesty, ethical compromises and exposure to corrupt political practices. The study concludes that female Muslims involvement in politics is both necessary and beneficial for balanced societal development, provided that it is guided by Islamic moral frameworks.

Keywords: Female Muslims, Political Involvement, Morality.

Introduction

Globally, women's participation in politics as voters, candidates, elected officials, and policy influencers is recognized not only as a matter of equity and democratic deepening but also as a catalyst for improved governance outcomes, including transparency, social welfare, and community cohesion. Within this global discourse, Muslim women's political involvement has gained particular prominence due to intertwined debates about religion, culture, gender norms, and civic rights. The extent and nature of such involvement vary widely across contexts, shaped by historical legacies, institutional arrangements, social norms, and theological interpretations. In the Nigerian context, women's political participation has historically been constrained by sociocultural barriers, patriarchal norms, and structural inequalities. Although Nigeria's 1999 Constitution guarantees equal rights and freedoms, including political rights irrespective of gender, women remain underrepresented in elective and appointive positions at federal, state, and local levels. This underrepresentation is even more pronounced in the North West Geo-Political Zone, a region characterized by strong religious identities, conservative social structures, and enduring gendered norms.

The North West zone, comprising the states of Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Jigawa, Sokoto, Zamfara, and Kebbi, is predominantly Muslim and deeply influenced by Islamic values and traditional institutions. In these settings, women's visibility in the public sphere, especially political leadership, is shaped by intersecting factors: religious interpretations of gender roles, customary practices, socioeconomic status, and levels of education. While there is no Islamic injunction that universally prohibits women's political participation, divergent interpretations of religious texts and patriarchal reclamations of tradition often limit women's engagement in politics. For example, in some local communities, influential leaders cite cultural-religious norms to discourage women from contesting for elective offices, participating in political rallies, or holding decision-making positions within political parties.

Concept of Politics in Western Perspective

Generally speaking, it is difficult to define politics from western perspective because there are many definitions by various western scholars that conflict or sometimes complement one another. But in spite of this, there is general agreement among scholars that the concept of politics in the Western world is rooted in ancient Greek philosophy, particularly in the works of Aristotle. In this tradition, politics is understood as the art of governing and the study of government, focusing on the organization, distribution, and exercise of power within societies. For Easton (1965), politics as "an authoritative allocation of scarce resources" To him, politics is the means that enable the political class to use their authority in distribution and allocation of wealth or resources in order to ensure even development and progress to the populace. Karl Marx also perceived politics as "conflict and conflict resolution." In this regard, politics may lead to conflict between competitive parties on looking for political relevance or capturing the state power. More so, politics may equally lead to conflict resolution among the contending parties. The managers and administrators would apply politics in solving their industrial dispute among the conflicting parties in their organization. The following are some of the Key aspects of the Western concept of politics (Heywood, 2019; Held, 2006)

- a. **State and Government:** The Western concept of politics emphasizes the importance of the state and government in maintaining social order, providing public goods, and protecting individual rights.
- b. **Democracy:** Western politics often emphasizes democratic principles, such as free and fair elections, representation, and accountability, as a means of ensuring that power is exercised in a responsible and responsive manner.
- c. **Individual Rights and Freedoms:** The Western concept of politics places a strong emphasis on protecting individual rights and freedoms, such as freedom of speech, assembly, and the press.
- d. **Rule of Law:** Western politics is characterized by a strong emphasis on the rule of law, which holds that all individuals and institutions are subject to the law and that the law is applied impartially and fairly.

- e. Separation of Powers: The Western concept of politics often includes a system of checks and balances, where power is divided among separate branches of government (legislative, executive, and judicial) to prevent any one branch from becoming too powerful.
- f. Pluralism: Western politics recognizes the diversity of interests, values, and beliefs within society and seeks to accommodate these differences through a system of representation and compromise.
- g. Liberalism: Western politics is often associated with liberal values, such as individualism, equality, and freedom, which emphasize the importance of individual autonomy and the protection of individual rights.

Concept of Politics in Islam

The Arabic terminology for politics is “*As-Siyāsah*”. It literally means an act of taking control over something. Technically, according to Qardawi, the ancient scholars of Islam used the word “*Siyāsah*” to mean either of the following two connotations: to take control over human affairs by implementing the Islamic law as code of conduct and it also means a policy formulated by the Imam i.e. president or head of a nation. However, the first connotation is the general intention of scholars when *Siyāsah* is mentioned. Thus, it corresponds to the English word, politics, which means science or art of government or the science dealing with the form, organization and administration of state. It can be deduced from the foregoing that the only distinction between Islamic politics and other systems is that in the former, every process, activity and procedure through which the state is governed are subjected to the values of Islamic principles. The Prophet (SAW) says:

Every condition that is not in accordance with the
Book of Allah is invalid, even if there are one hundred
such conditions. (al-Bukhārī, 2168)

According to Ibn Kathir (2000) Allah commands that all types of trusts be fulfilled. Those who do not implement this command in this life, it will be extracted from them on the Day of resurrection. While in other systems of political arrangements, every individual wants to display political right via ambitions for leadership position, and this could be several of challenges to man as highlighted by the Prophet (SAW). Furthermore, the concept of *shura* (consultation) is integral to Islamic political theory, as demonstrated in *Surah Ash-Shura* (42:38):

And those who have responded to their lord and established
prayer and whose affair is [determined by] consultation among
themselves, and from what we have provided them, they
spend." (Q42:38)

Ibn Kathir (2000) said they do not make a decision without consulting one another on the matter so that they can help one another by sharing their ideas concerning issues such as wars and other matters. Islamic politics is viewed as a multifaceted concept that incorporates religious

principles, ethical considerations, and practical governance structures aimed at promoting justice, welfare, and consultation within society. The Qur'an states:

Those who, if We establish them in the land, establish prayer and give *zakah* and enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. And to Allah belongs the outcome of all matters. (Q22:41)

If the believers are to enjoy authority on the earth, they must never behave like the tyrannical forces described. They must fulfil the duty of worshipping God, which prevents them from all kinds of evil and leads to their spiritual and moral perfection. They must also pay the Prescribed Purifying Alms, which will purify their hearts of a love for wealth, and which eliminates any class differences in society, thus establishing social justice, balance, and peace. Moreover, they will support, promote, and spread all good acts, and try to prevent all evil ones. This means that believers can never have worldly or personal aims in fighting, such as the conquest or colonization of lands, the subjugation of peoples, the attainment of wealth, or the usurpation of the property of others. (Unal, 2015)

Islamic View on Women Participation in Politics

Politics, in the perception of Islam, is a collective religious responsibility. Muslims, as a group, must conduct their political activities in keeping with the teachings of Islam. Each individual is also required to do whatever is humanly possible to advance the course of Islam through his political undertaking. Muslim woman is as responsible as the Muslim man is in establishing a just system in which the law of Allah will be supreme (Maududi, 1980). Political system in Islam places equal obligation on men and women in commanding the *ma'ruf* (good) and forbidding the *munkar* (evil). This fundamental political obligation is gender neutral. *Surah Taubah* (Quran 9: 71) says:

The believers, men and women, are protecting friends (*Awliya*) of one another; they enjoin the *ma'ruf* (that which Allah commands) and forbid people from *munkar* (that which Allah prohibits); they perform *Salat*, and give the *Zakah*, and obey Allah and His messenger. Allah will have mercy on them. Surely Allah is Almighty, All-wise". (Q9: 71)

Islam commands the Muslim men, as it commands the women, to be concerned with the affairs of the community. Women are allowed and encouraged to engage in political participation as long as this does not compromise their primary roles as wives and mothers. The pledges of *Aqbah* in the early period of Islam could be seen as one of the many forms through which leadership is bestowed upon a leader by his people. The Prophet (SAW) accepted homage during the two pledges from both men and women (Ibn Hishmam, 1990). If the presence of women at the two *Aqbah* pledges was not as important as that of men, the Prophet (SAW) would have asked the men to come alone during the second *Aqbah* and pay the homage for and

on behalf of women. Muslim women served as special advisors to the Prophet and the subsequent Muslim Caliphs. When the Muslims entered into a truce with pagan *Makkans* at *Hudaibiyyah*, some of the *Sahaba* were not happy with some of the terms. Therefore, when the Prophet directed them to disengage from the *Umrah* many of them did not comply. The wise advice of Um Salma, one of his wives, that the Prophet (SAW) should perform the ritual of giving up the *Umrah* himself saved the situation. For immediately he performed the ritual, the *Sahaba* complied. Al-Qaradawi also raises two substantive arguments against the plausibility of a rule prohibiting women from leaving their homes. First, confinement to the home was imposed in the earliest stages of Islamic law as a punishment for sexual misconduct, so it is factually implausible that what began as a penal sanction became a general duty for all Muslim females. Second, a tacit consensus exists among modern Muslims that female participation in public affairs is permissible.

Al-Qaradawi follows the same approach with respect to the Prophetic statement “never shall a folk prosper who have appointed a woman to rule them” and Quran 4:34’s statement that “men are the maintainers of women” that he took toward Quran 33:33: he first casts doubt on the clarity of the language, and then suggests that a different reading of the texts - one that would permit women’s participation in politics - is the more plausible reading. Moreover, Muslims have not, as a historical matter, agreed to the proposition that women were categorically prohibited from exercising power over men. First, there was unanimity that women could serve as muftis (individual scholars with expertise in the law who are qualified to answer the legal questions of non-specialists). Second, a minority of Muslims jurists, including the historically influential Hanafi School of law which dominated the Ottoman Empire, permitted women to serve as judges in all but capital cases. Third, any historical consensus regarding the exclusion of women from certain political offices was limited to the office of the caliphate, an office which no longer exists. Accordingly, he concludes that, at a minimum, there is nothing in Islamic religious texts that would prohibit some women from exercising political power over some men. In any case, the most plausible reading of the Prophet Muhammad’s words, according to al-Qaradawi, is not that it communicates a universal norm disparaging the ability of women to be successful political leaders, but rather, given what is known about the historical circumstances of the Prophet’s statement, that the Prophet Muhammad was referring to the internal turmoil of the Persian state at the time, and the arbitrariness of their system of dynastic rule that led them to appoint the daughter of the late king as their leader despite the fact that more competent leaders were available. Indeed, al-Qaradawi criticizes the traditional interpretation of this hadith as creating a contradiction with the Quran, which includes a positive account of the leadership qualities and political acumen of Bilqis, the Biblical Queen of Sheba. (al-Qaradawi, 1999).

Muslim scholars are unanimous that a woman cannot go out of her home without valid excuse. This led to categorization of women with reference to their appeal to men. For instance, Shaykh bin fodio categorized women into three; charming, ugly and aged. The charming ladies,

especially those with exceptional beauty, are not allowed to go out without valid excuse. Ugly ones on the other hand are allowed to go out; and to attend congregational prayer. The third category, aged women, is free to attend any function and run errand for women in the first and second categories (Irshad, 2003). As can be seen, the categorization is made taking into consideration the attention each would attract from their male counterpart. Therefore, going by this categorization, women in the first and second categories will not be allowed to occupy the office of the caliph because of what close contact with their male subordinates would cause. However, women in the third category seem to be the only ones that *Shari'ah* may likely allow to occupy the position going by the categorization and what informed it (Irshad, 2003). Allah (SWT) says:

And women of post-menstrual age who have no desire for marriage there is no blame upon them for putting aside their outer garments, but not displaying adornment. But to modestly refrain (from that) is better for them. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing." (Q24:60)

Notwithstanding, the Prophet (SAW) was reported to have said:

A nation will not prosper if it entrusts its leadership to a woman (al-Bukhari, 4425)

Precautionary Regulation on Female Muslim Participation in Politics

Islamic law accepts the legitimacy of certain kinds of precautionary regulation designed to prevent harm, a technique of reasoning called "blocking the means" (*sadd al-dhari'a*). Essentially, this principle permits the proscription of otherwise innocent conduct because the proscribed conduct is a conduit to unlawful conduct. The following narration buttresses the statement:

Abdullāh ibn 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ reported: We were with the Prophet (SAW) when a young man came and said, "O Messenger of Allah, may I kiss (my wife) while I am fasting?" The Prophet (SAW) replied, "No." Later, an old man came and said, "O Messenger of Allah, may I kiss (my wife) while I am fasting?" The Prophet (SAW) replied, "Yes." We looked at one another in surprise, and the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: "*I know why you are looking at each other. The old man can control himself, but the young man may not be able to restrain his desires* (Abu Dawud, 2387).

The Qur'an further elucidates the statement:

And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it has ever been an immorality and is evil as a way." (Qur'an 17:32)

According to Unal (2015): The word translated as unlawful sexual intercourse is *zinā*, a word which signifies all sexual intercourse between a man and woman who are not husband and wife, and therefore denotes both “adultery” and “fornication” in English. The Qur’ān not only forbids any unlawful sexual intercourse, but also orders that all ways to it be blocked by saying, do not draw near. So, just as a Muslim community or state is obliged to take all measures to prevent unlawful sexual intercourse in society, so, too, are individuals required to hold back from everything that may lead to it. Through the rules it has introduced and the spiritual and moral training it offers, Islam seeks to close the door to unlawful sexual intercourse, as well as other evils. Al-Qaradawi accepts the legitimacy of *sadd al-dhara’i’* (“blocking the means”); however, he insists that its application requires substantial empirical justification, certainly more than the pre-modern jurists would have required.

One particularly disabling class of precautionary rules barred women from mixing with men on the grounds that exclusion of females was necessary to prevent sexual impropriety. As applied to the issue of female political participation, the argument runs as follows: for a woman to participate in politics, particularly as a candidate for elective office, she will inevitably mix with crowds of strangers, and speak to them in public and private, giving rise to situations in which there is a high risk that Islamic norms of sexual propriety will not be observed. If she is successful in her campaign, moreover, such situations will be multiplied and perhaps become a regular part of her daily life (Kamali, 2008).

Concept of Morality in Islamic Perspective

In Islam, morality is deeply connected to divine commandments, and it is viewed as a fundamental part of the faith. The moral code in Islam is based primarily on the Qur'an and the *Hadith*. Islamic morality emphasizes the intrinsic connection between the worship of God (Allah) and ethical behaviour. Put it differently, in Islamic thought or perspective, morality is deeply rooted in the Quran and the *Hadith*. Islamic morality is based on the concept of *Tawhid* (the oneness of God), which emphasizes the unity and sovereignty of Allah (Rahman, 1980). The concept of morality in Islam centers on certain basic beliefs and principles. Among these are the followings: (1) God is the Creator and Source of all goodness, truth and beauty. (2) Man is a responsible, dignified, and honourable agent of his Creator. (3) God has put everything in the heavens and the earth in the service of mankind. (4) By His Mercy and Wisdom, God does not expect the impossible from man or hold him accountable for anything beyond his power. Nor does God forbid man to enjoy the good things of life. (5) Moderation, practicality, and balance are the guarantees of high integrity and sound morality. (6) All things are permissible in principle except what is singled out as forbidden, which must be avoided. (7) Man’s ultimate responsibility is to God and his highest goal is the pleasure of his Creator. The Qur’an explains:

And why should we not believe in Allah and what has come to us of the truth? And we aspire that our Lord will admit us to the company of the righteous. (Qur’an 5:84)

The moral principles of Islam are sometimes stated as positive commitments which must be fulfilled and sometimes as negative prescriptions which must be avoided. Whether they are stated positively or negatively, they are designed to build in the human being a sound mind, a peaceful soul, a strong personality, and a healthy body. For instance, the Qur'an states:

Say, 'My Lord has only forbidden immoralities what is apparent of them and what is concealed and sin, and oppression without right, and that you associate with Allah that for which He has sent down no authority, and that you say about Allah that which you do not know. (Q7:33)

According to Yusuf (1410 AH) The forbidden things are described in four categories: (1) what is shameful or unbecoming; the sort of things which have also legal and social sanctions, not of a local but of a universal kind; they may be called offences against society: (2) sins against self and trespasses or excesses of every sort; these are against truth and reason; here would come in indiscipline, failure in doing intangible duties not clearly defined by law; selfishness or self-aggrandizement, which may be condoned by custom and not punished by law, etc.: (3) erecting fetishes or false gods; this is treason against the true God; and (4) corrupting religion by debasing superstitions. The Prophet (SAW) says:

Righteousness is good character, and sin is what wavers in your soul and you dislike that people come to know of it.
(Muslim, 2553)

According to Yusuf (1410 AH) we are given a beautiful description of the righteous and God-fearing man. He should obey salutary regulations, but he should fix his gaze on the love of Allah and the love of his fellowmen. We are given four heads: (1) our faith should be true and sincere; (2) we must be prepared to show it in deeds of charity to our fellow-men; (3) we must be good citizens, supporting social organisation: and (4) our own individual soul must be firm and unshaken in all circumstances. The Almighty Allah says:

And they say, "We have believed in Allah and in the Messenger, and we obey"; then a party of them turns away after that. But those are not believers. And when they are called to Allah and His Messenger to judge between them, at once a party of them turns aside in refusal. But if the right is theirs, they come to him in prompt obedience. Is there disease in their hearts? Or have they doubted? Or do they fear that Allah will be unjust to them, or His Messenger? Rather, it is they who are the wrongdoers. (Q24:47–50)

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that female Muslim involvement in politics is a sensitive and complex issue that lies at the intersection of religion, culture, and contemporary political practice. Islam, as established in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, does not

categorically prohibit women's participation in public and political affairs. However, it places strong emphasis on moral discipline, modesty, and accountability before Allah in all spheres of life. The negative perceptions surrounding female Muslim political participation, as revealed by this study, are largely attributable to the morally permissive nature of contemporary political environments rather than to intrinsic Islamic opposition to women's public engagement. Consequently, the moral challenges identified are products of systemic ethical deficiencies within political structures, which tend to undermine Islamic values. The study therefore concludes that female Muslim participation in politics is morally acceptable within an Islamic framework when it is guided by clearly defined ethical boundaries. Such participation must be value-driven, purpose-oriented, and regulated by Islamic principles in order to preserve personal morality, family stability, and societal respect.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Islamic scholars, preachers, and organizations should intensify moral and religious sensitization programmes aimed at guiding Muslim women who aspire to participate in politics, with emphasis on *taqwa*, modesty, and ethical leadership.
2. Political parties and government institutions should formulate and enforce codes of conduct that respect religious and moral values, including regulated rallies, respectful modes of interaction, and family-friendly political schedules.
3. Families and Muslim communities should provide moral, emotional, and advisory support to female Muslim politicians while ensuring adherence to Islamic ethical standards.
4. Training workshops and leadership programmes should be organized for female Muslim politicians to equip them with skills in ethical governance, public communication, and Islamic civic responsibility.
5. Mosques, Islamic centers, and faith-based organizations should play active roles in monitoring, advising, and mentoring Muslim women in political leadership to prevent moral compromise.

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