



## SOCIO-POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT AND WOMEN ENGAGEMENT IN EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

There is a growing concern regarding the poor participation of women in Nigeria's political ecosystem. However, mounting evidence supports the claim that women are making strides in political representation in contemporary societies. This development is evident in the political arena of Edo state, Nigeria. As a result, the study aimed to investigate the attitudinal dimension of women in the state toward engaging in political activities. Five hundred and sixteen women from various locations in Edo state were randomly selected to participate in the study. Respondents completed a self-report measure of attitude toward political engagement. 78.3% of respondents, with a mean difference of 0.98, exhibited a more favorable attitude toward political participation than 21.7% of their counterparts. It was concluded that attitude is crucial to the link between women and politics. It is proposed that women's political participation be encouraged.

**Keywords:** Attitudes, political engagement, women, Edo state

### Introduction

If a person does not understand, respect, or participate in the democratic process, they are politically disengaged. Studies show that while some citizens are dissatisfied with democratic procedures and desire more opportunities to be involved, others feel similarly but are less interested in participating. In Nigeria, political disengagement takes different forms and is more prevalent among women. Women's participation in the democratic political ecology has been a topic of international interest for a long time. Voting reflects empowerment by raising awareness of women's rights (Baker, 2018; Khan & Shah, 2020). However, the low participation of women in politics and governance has been a concern in every society (Anyango et al., 2018; Asekere, 2020; Hamidu et al., 2018; Indriastuti, 2018; Kasomo, 2012; Maphosa et al., 2015; Marwah, 2019; Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019; Nwabunkeonye, 2014; Okeke, 2015; Olufunke, 2013). The trend has led to a decline in women's involvement in politics. Perhaps the political settings are predominantly considered a unique domain for men (Ibrahim & Mussarat, 2015; Jakešević & Luša, 2021).

As a result of their sheer numbers and inherent qualities, women in many countries have provided crucial support for the election of political leaders (Joy et al., 2021). As a result, there is a severe lack of them in authoritative roles (Ameen & Student, 2018; Dim & Asomah, 2019). One of the significant roadblocks to economic growth may be women's lack of participation in politics (Orisadare, 2019). It is plausible that the low representation of women in politics reflects the low priority given to women's issues about development and institutional capacities. Women and men should have equal opportunities to participate in politics and decision-making, as outlined in the United Nations' Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). This means that many nations still have a ways to go before they achieve true gender parity.

Women are underrepresented in governmental politics around the world. A complex interplay of socio-economic, political, and cultural factors results in inadequate representation of women. These factors are largely common in nature globally, although the extent of the factors varies across nations. The political landscape of Nigeria is generally characterized as a men's business in that men primarily occupy the political arena. For example, there has been a steady decline in female politicians in Nigeria since 2011, and the 2023 elections in Africa's largest economy verified the predicted low outcomes for women. Nigeria's National Assembly has lost 19% of its female

representation since the last assembly, with only 3% of the Senate and 4% of the House of Representatives held by women.

Nevertheless, research suggests that women are less attracted to political business, less likely to follow political events, and more pessimistic about their competencies to be influential in politics (Wolak, 2020). However, the National Gender Policy (NGP) of Nigeria endorsed 35% affirmative action and sought a more all-encompassing representation of women, with at least 35% for elective and appointive posts (Oloyede, 2016). Even with the large population of women in Nigeria and their contribution to the development and sustenance of society (Odionye, 2016), their participation in decision-making and general political processes is relatively decreased compared to men (Abubakar & Ahmad, 2014). The women's inability to actively participate in the political business of Nigeria has further reinforced the political gender gap and the perception of women as predominantly overseers of domestic chores.

It is not just a Nigerian problem; some people believe politics is a job for men. People have questioned women's ability to be political leaders and politicians everywhere. Additionally, the gendered division of labor has resulted in women having a greater responsibility for household duties, which reduces the amount of time they have available for other activities, such as politics. As a consequence of this, it should not come as a surprise that patriarchal ideas still seem to be prevalent in today's culture. It was said that a general environment and culture that does not view women as capable of politics is one of the impediments that prevents women from participating in politics. There is a possibility that both men and women hold negative attitudes. However, the attitudes of males have been cited more frequently as a cause that inhibits women's activities.

The poor women's engagement in politics has been attributed to several factors. For instance, discrimination and religiosity have widely restricted women from participating in active politics in the Nigerian context (Agishi, 2014; Ibrahim, 2014; Nwabunkeonye, 2014). Similarly, gender disparities (Azuh & Egharevba, 2014; Etor et al., 2013; Karubi & Wasudawan, 2020), political violence (Akpan, 2018), stigmatization (Suleiman, 2017), political support (Eme & Onuigbo, 2015), political godfather's (Okoosi-Simbine, 2012), quota system (Nelson, 2012), political knowledge (Badawi, 2007), and socio-cultural factors (Innocent et al., 2014) have been implicated in women lack of interest in the Nigerian politics. However, attitudes are an essential behavioral determinant with little research attention relative to women's women's women-political engagements.

Women tend to have more negative attitudes towards politics than men and are less likely to participate in political activities. Women are underrepresented in local government and Parliament. Although the poor participation of women in politics is pervasive across the six geopolitical regions of Nigeria, the current study is concerned with the political development in Edo State, Nigeria. Political development in the state has witnessed an overwhelming power wrangle. Indeed, since the creation of the state in 1991, the percentage of Edo women in politics has been below the advocated 30% affirmative action. However, many women have assumed political positions in the state and beyond. For example, Edo state is among the few states to produce a female speaker in the House of Assembly, and many women currently serve in the state executive council, including other political posts, making the state among the women-friendly political arena in the contemporary political dispensation in Nigeria. Notwithstanding, women's engagement in the state's political terrain is still below the acceptable threshold. Thus, the present paper aims to ascertain women's overall attitudes toward political engagement in Edo State, Nigeria.

**Research question:** *What are women's attitudes toward political engagement in Edo State, Nigeria?*

Attitudes are a psychosocial construct that reflects an individual's positive or negative evaluation of a situation. Attitudes have been found to influence behavior in favorable and unfavorable dimensions (Felnhofer et al., 2021; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). Accordingly, attitudes are a function of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dispositions (Crismán-Pérez, 2020; Garcia-Santillan et al., 2012; Kwon & Vogt, 2010; Svenningsson et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021), which means that it involves reasoning, feelings, and actions. The current paper describes women's attitudes towards politics as their overall awareness, likes/dislikes, and intention to participate.

## Method

This research made use of a survey. Based on the research objective, only women participated in the study. Women aged 18 to 60 years were randomly selected from different locations in Edo state of Nigeria. There were no educational, marital, location, employment, or socio-economic barriers to participation. About six hundred and twelve (612) women were approached between August and September 2024. They were urged to participate in the study to understand their attitudes towards politics in the state. Five hundred sixty-seven consented to participate in the study, while others declined. Those who agreed were given the study questionnaire to assess their positive or negative attitudes toward political participation. In the end, five hundred and sixteen (516) copies of the questionnaires were appropriately completed and returned. However, the remaining copies were either not returned or inappropriately filled; thus, they were discarded.

## Result

The data gathered with the questionnaire were subjected to analysis using simple percentages, mean, and standard deviation to answer the research question. Thus, the table below shows that 78.3% of the women ( $M = 1.99, SD = 0.71$ ) exhibited a positive attitude towards political engagement. On the other hand, 21.7% ( $M = 1.01, SD = 0.95$ ) showed a negative attitude towards political engagement. Therefore, the result indicates that most respondents have positive attitudes towards political engagement.

**Table 1** shows the percentage, mean, and standard deviation score of the attitudes toward political engagement.

	N	%	M	SD
Favorable attitude	405	78.3	1.99	0.71
Unfavorable attitude	111	21.7	1.01	0.95
Total	516	100		

## Discussion

The present study examined the attitudinal dimension of women in Edo state, Nigeria, towards political engagement. Data from representative samples were analyzed using simple percentages and mean scores. The outcome revealed that the majority of the respondents (78.3%) ( $M = 1.99, SD = 0.71$ ) exhibited a positive attitude towards political engagement compared to their counterparts (21.7%) ( $M = 1.01, SD = 0.95$ ), with a  $MD = 0.98$ . Given the tri-components of attitude, the result showed that most women in the state have good knowledge about politics (Cognitive component), may have developed positive feelings towards the political framework (Affective component), and are most prepared to engage in the political business (Behavioral component). The result describes the political nature of the state as embedding a culture of gender equality and good governance. Such aspiration and accompanying framework, as necessary, make clear that the state needs evidence to draw attention to gaps and make evident progress on women in political participation. The result reflects Africa's dream where women have the perception of the right attitude about the political ecosystem. The right attitude creates the opportunity for unbiased participation in all levels of political decision-making without hindrance, without fear, and with full support. Special measures to correct unfavorable attitudes must be implemented to ensure the region has long committed to improving gender equality in political engagement.

At the national level, the result offers essential insights into existing attitudinal barriers preventing women from participating in politics while identifying critical areas for urgent intervention towards enhancing women's political participation in Nigeria. The research reveals the glaring possibility that can propel the full engagement of women in politics in a concerted fashion across the different geopolitical regions of the country. At the global level, Sustainable Development Goal Five on gender equality provides for women's increased and meaningful participation in political decision-making. This global agenda to be achieved by 2030 will be facilitated through positive attitudes. While some African countries have surpassed the 50% mark of women in political decision-making at a parliament level, there is a need to cultivate positive attitudes for women to participate in politics in the Nigerian political system.

## Conclusion

The dismal participation of women in politics has instigated queries in several democratic societies. The present survey investigated the attitudes of women towards political participation. Five hundred and sixteen female adults were recruited from the Edo state of Nigeria for the study. The analysis performed on the data indicated that many women in the state exhibit favorable attitudes toward politics. The result has implications for the political development of the sustained democratic dispensation in Nigeria. Thus, the finding provides valuable data to political interest groups, non-governmental organizations, and policy-makers. Indeed, the study is fraught with some limitations. Firstly, self-reported attitudes are challenged by biased reporting. Future research should employ multiple data collection methods to minimize false reporting. Also, the sampling size may not guarantee the generalization of the result. Therefore, research should adopt more comprehensive samples. Given that many factors govern attitudes, more research is needed to examine the influencing variables that could determine women's attitudes toward political engagement in the state and Nigeria. However, the present finding contributes to the political literature by proving that women in the Edo state are willing to participate in the political system. Thus, it is recommended that political parties give women the opportunity to take part in the political business of the democratic ecosystem.

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