

WOMEN SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: A STUDY OF IMO STATE (2015 – 2019)

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ABSTRACT: This study focused on women's socioeconomic status and political participation in Imo State (2015–2019). The study was carried out to identify the extent of women's political participation. Two research objectives, two research questions and two research hypotheses, guided the study. For the methodology, a survey research design was used, and a questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection. The population of the study covers all 150 political party executives—50 each from the 3 major political parties (APGA, PDP, and APC) in Imo State and the entire CGC principal executives in the 671 autonomous communities in Imo State, from which 180 were sampled (out of 180 copies of the questionnaire distributed, only 170 were properly filled and returned). The data collected are presented in tables and were analysed via simple percentages, and hypotheses were tested via chi-square tests. Low income discourages women's political participation, and women's educational levels affect their ability to stand for an election. On the basis of these findings, it is recommended that the income of women in Nigeria be improved so that women can be financially viable to participate in politics. Moreover, women should be allowed to engage in corporate occupations, which will give them the needed prestige and financial improvement to participate actively in politics.

Keywords: Women's Socioeconomic Status, Political Participation, Income and Education

INTRODUCTION

In most societies, women assume five key roles: mother, producer, home manager, community organizer and sociocultural and political activist (Agbalajobi, 2018). Among these roles, the latter has been engendered by women's movements attributed to historical gender discrimination and inequality. This means that the importance of women's active political participation within democratic political contexts cannot be overemphasized. This is because women's political participation typically ensures transparency, accountability, legitimacy, and responsiveness of the political system at all levels of government in the general interests of collectivity (Kasa, (2015); National Democratic Institute, 2016; and USAID, 2016). Research evidence, for example, demonstrates that "women in politics raise issues that others overlook, pass bills that others oppose, invest in projects others dismiss and seek to end abuses that others ignore" (National Democratic Institute, 2016, p.l.).

In particular, it enables women to address problems, including discriminatory laws, confront them in society, as they can best articulate their needs and mobilize necessary political resources to meet those needs if they are reasonably represented in politics and decision-making processes generally (Kasa, 2015).

Despite this growing body of evidence showing the need for an increase in women's involvement in politics, women continue to lag behind men in terms of political representation in both developed and developing countries alike, although this situation varies from one context to another (Inter-Parliament Union, 2017). Many factors contribute to this. One such major factor is the socioeconomic status of women. Socioeconomic status has been operationalized in a variety of ways, most commonly as education, occupation, social class, and income. According to Achike (2019), socioeconomic status is the social standing or class of an individual or group.

When one has low socioeconomic status, this affects one's social behavior. In Nigeria and many other African countries, women are marginalized in educational training, good occupations, and a low income base. According to Uangbaoje (2019), education, income and occupation are the basic indicators of social mobility. For that, women who are disadvantaged in the above variables are likely to pay less attention to political participation. While women represent more than half of the world's population (Kasa, 2015), their representation in politics is less than thirty percent globally, despite the improvement in women's political participation in the last two decades (National Democratic Institute, 2016, p. 1).

As of June 2019, Africa's average female representation in the legislature, for example, is 23.3% on the basis of seats held. In Nigeria, female representation in the legislative arm of government is 5.7% (Inter-Parliament Union, 2018). This shows that the representation of women in the government has been less impressive in Nigeria, which has adopted a democratic political system since 1999. Here, Nigeria is one of the countries with the lowest degree of women's political participation. In terms of membership in the legislature, for example, the average female representation is 5.8%. Additionally, the current administration has only six women as ministers of states, whereas thirty-one men are ministers (Nagarajan, 2015).

In view of Fatile, Adepoju, O Adepoju and Ayeni (2017), there is a need for improved women's political participation. Women's participation in Nigerian politics, for example, can be useful for raising and addressing issues of high infant and maternal mortalities, domestic violence, child marriage, and child labor confronting Nigerian women and girls (Central Intelligence Agency (CIA); 2017; UN Women, 2011). Nigerian women's low participation in politics, both at the voting and elective positions, is not without its attendant consequences. According to Michelle Bachelet, the UN Women Executive Director, "countries with more women in parliament tend to have more equitable laws and social programmes and budgets that benefit women and children and families" (UN Women, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, there have been raging debates over the participation or desire of women in Nigerian politics. Some argue that women are regarded as weaker than men are social constructs owing to their social value, norms and beliefs, which have neglected their meaningful contributions and have placed them in a subordinate position to men in the nation's political system. This 'sexual division of labour' in the political system is often traced to the onset of colonialism in Nigeria. Their Western cultural notion of male superiority is reflected in their relations with Nigerians. Considering socioeconomic issues, the 1922 Sir Hugh Clifford Constitution disenfranchised

women and limited the participation of adult males to wealthy individuals. This is not to say that there was no existing element of gender inequality in traditional state and stateless societies in Nigeria but that the colonial order made gender discrimination more pronounced.

Here, women's historical experience of discrimination puts them at a disadvantage economically. Political campaigns are expensive and require solid financial support for success. Over the years, the sexual division of labour and job opportunities offered on a sex basis has given men productive gender roles, enabling them to possess more purchasing power over their female counterparts. As an implication, in the Nigerian labour market, approximately 75% of labour is supplied by men. This economic disparity favours men to the disadvantage of women. Societal value assumes that political activities are masculine and that this makes it worse, as financiers and sponsors of politicians prefer male candidates to female candidates since they believe that they stand a better chance.

Research Questions

On the basis of the research objectives, the following research questions were formulated for the study.

1. To what extent does income increase women's involvement in contesting election?
2. Does women's educational level affect their ability to stand for an election?

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine women's socioeconomic status and political participation in Imo State. Specifically, the study is designed to:

1. Identifying the extent to which income enhances women's involvement in contesting election.
2. To determine whether women's educational level affects their ability to stand for an election.

Research Hypotheses

On the basis of our objectives of the study and research questions, the following hypotheses guided the study.

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between income and women's involvement in contesting elections.

H02: Women's educational level does not affect their ability to stand for an election.

Significance of the Study

This study will be very theoretical and practical, beneficial and useful to many stakeholders.

Practical significance: The government and political leaders find this study useful. They will see the reasons to encourage women's active participation in politics since empowered political women have proven that women can contribute actively and positively well to the political and economic wellbeing of the country. The government then makes and implements laws that encourage women's political participation. The political leaders and parties also play by the rule and avoid malpractices that discourage women from becoming involved in politics. Political parties will also elect and appoint women in executive positions, etc. This study will enable INEC to understand the importance of conducting free and fair elections so that women can be encouraged to participate in politics. The gender of women will also benefit from the study. This is true because the government, political leaders, traditional leaders, religious leaders and legal institutions and political parties will eliminate all constraints on women's political involvement and encourage them politically. This is because empowered women have shown that they have much to offer. On this basis, more women will be involved in Nigerian politics at all levels.

Theoretical significance: This study contributes to understanding the knowledge gap in the subject matter. Future researchers will understand what should be covered and what remains to be covered in the subject matter and use the work for reference purposes. The electorates will see reasons to vote and support women during elections and other political issues.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptual Review

Concept of Political Participation

Political participation is the overt or covert level of involvement by citizens of a given polity in various forms of political activity in their society (Egwu, 2018). Political participation cuts across various aspects of a nation's political life, ranging from daily service in government, attendance of political party rallies, meetings, voting and being voted for in party elections, or national elections, obedience of a national political obligation and laws as well as deliberate opposition to political activities, such as campaigns against specific political issues, all constitute political participation (Egwu, 2018). These are actions of individuals and groups within the political system that have some consequences for the polity. Here, refusal by pressure or an interest group to be counted in an election and other forms of protest against the policy and activities of political office holders constitute political participation.

Political apathy and even alienation, whether self-imposed or externally performed, is an aspect of political participation that causes the polity to lose a reasonable voice of opposition as checkmates on the excesses of political office holders, policy makers and rulers (Okafor, 2019). However, Unanka, in his book political "behaviour (2010:156), sees political participation as "involvement in political activities, ranging from listening to political talks and taking part in decision-making to involvement in the execution of political violence". Political participation varies in intensity from one individual or group to another. At the highest level of intensity is political participation. At the highest level of intensity, political participation could be active; at the low level, it could be passive, even to the point of apathy (withdrawal). Active political participation is engaged in both by political elites and non elites, politicians and a select part of the masses.

Nonelite politicians are people who are not quite accurately called decision-makers and implementers but who, as members of political parties and pressure groups, can contest elections as candidates and vie for political leadership or can significantly influence government decisions. The active masses include those who do not necessarily belong to any political party or pressure group and cannot contest any election for any public office but who, or who ordinarily, can influence governmental decisions, where necessary, by resorting to violence. Passive political participation is engaged in by the general public (Chukwu, 2018). The general masses could do any one or none of the following: read newspapers, occasionally talk about politics with neighbours, attend political rallies, cheer candidate parties, vote, etc. Okpata, Ugwumba and Okereke (2010:91) view political participation as the conscious act of citizen involvement in the determination of the structure and composition of the government of a state. Apathy to political issues by citizens may create constraints on political development among undemocratic polities.

Such apathy and loss of interest in political activities, which may be handy work of the dominant politicians and their cohorts bent on perpetuating their rule and hegemony in their society, can create a crisis of underdevelopment in a given polity. Active involvement in governance, contests for and holding public office, participation in elections campaigns, rigging, meeting out violence to the opposition and other overt and covert actions by citizens to condition the polity are also aspects of political participation (Egwu, 2018). The general level of political participation in a society is the extent to which the people as a whole are active in politics. Political participation, according to Adefemi and Agunbiade (2019), involves taking part in politics. This definition then raises the question of what constitutes politics. We then, for example, assume that activities within a political party or an organization, which regards itself as a pressure group, should count as political participation.

Organizations such as sports associations, traditional organizations, and clubs are not overtly political (Egwu and Egwu, 2016:44). With respect to the definitions above, political participation involves all citizens' participation or involvement in the politics of individual nations or states. Overall, political participation constitutes legal activities by citizens, which are directly aimed at influencing the selection of government functionaries who run the affairs of the state and influence their decision making and government policies.

Levels of Political Participation

Political participation can occur at various levels. Individuals being fully involved in political activities entails time, energy and resources. Individual resource costs. Individuals participate in politics at different levels and degrees, as discussed below. There are, of course, many classifications or levels of participation in the literature in view of Agina (2017:11). However, Lester Malbrath, cited in Egwu (2018), made a very useful classification of the levels of politicization; these include the following:

- i. Spectator level
- ii. Transitional level and
- iii. The gladiatorial level

1) Spectator level of participation: At this level of participation, typical activities include voting, initiating a public discussion, attempting to influence others into voting in a certain way and wearing a party badge or

displaying a party sticker (Egwu and Egwu 2016). The spectator activities above entail relatively little cost in terms of time, energy and resources. Consequently, many individuals participate more at this level than at any other level.

2) Transitional level of participation: At this level, activities involve the following:

- a) Attending political meetings
- b) Making some monetary contributions to a campaign and
- c) Contact of public officials or political leaders.

These activities require more time, energy and financial resources than the spectator level does. It is called transitional because of its general tendency for participants at this level to descend either to the spectator level or to ascend to the gladiatorial level. Fewer people, unlike spectators, are found at the transitional level because of the monetary aspect; approximately 3–4% are at this level in Nigeria (Egwu and Egwu 2016:10).

3) Gladiatorial level of participation: This is the most expensive level but the most effective form of political participation. Because of the expensive nature of this level, approximately 1--3% of the population is usually able to participate in these activities at the gladiatorial level of participation:

- a. Holding a public or party office, for example, legislature or executive posts.
- b. Being a candidate for a political office example contesting the position of president governor or chairmanship, etc.
- c. Soliciting or appalling for party funds.
- d. Attending a caucus or strategic meetings to decide for the party, or making policies.
- e. Contributing time or other resources to a campaign.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status (SES) is an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others. When analysing socioeconomic status, income, earners' education and occupation are examined (Chukwu, 2018). Socioeconomic status is typically broken into three levels, high, middle, and low, to describe the three places into which a family or an individual may fall. When an individual is placed into one of these categories, any or all three variables (income, education, and occupation) can be assessed (Okafor, 2019). According to Abiola (2019), socioeconomic status (SES) encompasses not only income but also educational attainment, financial security, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class. Socioeconomic status can encompass quality-of-life attributes as well as the opportunities and privileges afforded to people within society. Poverty, specifically, is not a single factor but rather is characterized by multiple physical and psychosocial stressors (Agina, 2017). According to Chukwu (2018), SES affects overall human functioning, including physical and mental health. Low SES and its correlates, such as lower educational achievement, poverty and poor health, ultimately affect our society. Inequities in health distribution, resource distribution, and quality of life are increasing in the United States and globally. Society benefits from an increased focus on the foundations of

socioeconomic inequities and efforts to reduce the deep gaps in socioeconomic status in the United States and abroad.

Women Income and Political Participation

According to Uangbaoje (2019), income is an economic condition that plays a very important role in changing the status of an individual. In other words, income is another important indicator of social mobility. On the basis of income, individuals can achieve high status in society. Even in the caste system, one's status improves because of improved economic conditions. In open societies as well, money is an important determinant of social class. It has also been found that the "new rich" have money, but they lack the life of upper-class people. They buy luxuries such as them, but it takes longer to adopt the mannerisms of upper-class people. Money has other subtle overtones, such as income from investments being more prestigious than income from welfare payments. Income from professions is better than wages (Uangbaoje, 2019). Money from speculation on stocks is better than money earned from gambling on sports (bet9ja in Nigeria). Therefore, the nature and source of one's income carry suggestions regarding one's family background and probable way of life.

Income refers to wages, salaries, profits, rents, and any flow of earnings received (Egwu, 2018). Income can also come in the form of unemployment or worker compensation; social security; pensions; interests or dividends; royalties; trusts; alimony; or other governmental, public, or family financial assistance. It can also come from monetary winnings, such as from lotteries and other games, or from contests where money is awarded as a prize. Income can be considered in two terms: relative and absolute. Absolute income is the relationship in which, as income increases, so will consumption, but not at the same rate (Fatile et al, 2017). Relative income dictates a person's or family's savings and consumption on the basis of the family's income in relation to others. Income is a commonly used measure of SES because it is relatively easy to measure for most individuals. When women are empowered politically, they take active part in politics and therefore contribute to the betterment of society. On record, financial resources are the major motivator for the active involvement of people in politics (Abiola, 2019). Most women do not contest for elective positions because they are not financially viable enough to do so.

For that, there is a need to enhance the financial status of women to encourage them to participate actively in politics. The neglect of women in Nigerian society (as it concerns financial resources) has only served as a disincentive (Ubah, 2011). Politics, particularly seeking elective office in Nigeria, as it is elsewhere, is an expensive venture requiring considerable financial involvement. The poor financial disposition of most women in Nigeria is a serious militating factor that accounts for most women's political defeat. The lack of financial muscles has placed womenfolk either as subordinates or weak players in the political game. Approximately 70% of women in Nigeria currently live below the poverty line (Chukwu, 2018). In this case, the cost of realizing electoral ambition is still far beyond the reach of even the most highly placed women in the absence of a godfather who is willing to "foot the bill in exchange for unlimited favour when the seat is eventually secured" (Yahaya, 2012:9). The relatively pathetic financial status of Nigerian women is a major limiting factor for their effective participation in politics.

Additionally, women's historical experience of discrimination puts them at a disadvantage economically. Political campaigns are expensive and require solid

financial backing for success (Adefemi & Agunbiade, 2019). Over the years, the sexual division of labour and job opportunities offered on a sex basis has given men productive gender roles, enabling them to possess more purchasing power over their female counterparts. As an implication, in the Nigerian labour market, approximately 75% of labour is supplied by men. This economic disparity favours men to the disadvantage of women. Only a few women who are affluent possess the economic power to bankroll political campaigns. Women's dependence on men financially manifested through wives' dependence on their husbands in families reveals the extent of the financial incapacitation of women in Nigerian politics. As a result, women's political aspirations have been grossly hampered by a lack of financial bedrock to subsist their endeavors (Damilola, 2010).

Women Education and Political Participation

According to Uangbaoje (2019), education is the prime means of social mobility. Ganze, de Graaf and Treiman (1992) cited in Uangbaoje (2019) further explains that education offers a chance to compensate for the various wrongs suffered by one's previous generations. However, it is also important to note that it cannot be considered a channel to acquire bureaucratic jobs because education increases only one's ability to take advantage of bureaucratic jobs. It increases one's ability to take advantage of opportunities in society. Education may provide know-how, which is valuable in business or profession, but there are other skills required to grab opportunities. Education also plays a role in income. In most cases, median earnings increase with each level of education (Chukwu, 2018). In some cases, the highest degrees, professional and doctoral degrees, make the highest earnings, whereas those with lower qualifications earn less. Higher levels of education are associated with better economic and psychological outcomes, i.e., more income, more control, and greater social support and networking.

Education plays a pivotal role in skill sets for acquiring jobs, as do specific qualities that stratify people with higher SES from those with lower SES. Here, where high- and middle-class parents take an active role in their children's education and development/training them to achieve high education, low-income parents have come to realize the benefit of education and are training their children to achieve even higher education for better future (Kasa, 2015). However, lower-income families can have children who do not succeed at the middle-income level, who can have a greater sense of entitlement, be more argumentative, or be better prepared for adult life. Education empowers everybody in society, including women. When women are empowered through education, they contribute positively to national development through active participation in politics (Okafor, 2019). Therefore, the high level of women neglect, as it concerns educational training at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, is the major challenge contributing to women's low degree of participation in Nigerian politics.

According to Kasa (2015), most Nigerian women do not have interest in politics because they are not educated or not informed about its significance; hence, there is a need for the reorientation of women in society to enable them to be interested in politics. A major social disadvantage for women in politics is mass illiteracy or low levels of education. A UNICEF Nigerian survey in 2014 revealed that only 60% of women aged 30–45 years manage to complete their elementary education, and only 26% proceed to the secondary level. Similarly, a survey by the National Planning Commission in 2018 indicated that 50% of women had no formal education (Okpilike and Abamba, 2019:159). This invariably translates to why comparably few

women qualify for jobs in the formal sector. The limited number of educated women also accounts for why only a few women present themselves as candidates for elective positions.

Effects of the Social Empowerment of Women on Political Participation

When women are empowered socially, they actively participate in politics.

1. **Women's involvement in political leadership:** A leader is defined by the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (2001) as a person who heads a group of people, especially the head of a country, an organization and political leaders. Women involved in Nigerian leadership will improve if they are well empowered. A leader must have charisma, which appeals to the citizens. A good political leader commands good political followership. Leaders or candidates with a particular strong personal appeal or candidates with charisma can bring many apathetic or political people into active political activities. In Nigeria, therefore, Chief Obafemi Awolowo (among the Yorubas) Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (among the Igbos) and Ahmadu Bello (among the Hausa-Falanis) of Nigeria had charismatic qualities, which mobilized or induced many tribesmen into politics. Unfortunately, none of these men in the past or present political dispensations in Nigeria ever rose to become national figures or charismatic national heroes; some present leaders are worse in that they cannot even mobilize their tribesmen into political action nationally (Egwu & Egwu, 2016:11). Therefore, when women are empowered, they take an active part in political leadership.
2. **Improving the socioeconomic status of women:** When women are empowered financially, this leads to improved socioeconomic status. Empirically, it has been shown that better educated, wealthier, and more occupationally skilled citizens are more likely, on average, to participate in politics than other citizens are. They acquire better prospects of being voted for and can also mobilize people easily for political activities. They have the class, clout and easily enjoy the acceptance of their people, political activities demand and require financial resources, and those economically viable readily provide them. Those who are educated and skilled benefit or are sponsored by wealthy people to contest for election. In so doing, they gain the confidence of their people and subsequently mobilize them easily (Egwu & Egwu, 2016:11). *The* socioeconomic status of Nigerian women is so low compared with that of men because of their dependent nature. Many of them depend on their husbands, etc., to execute all ventures involving money, which is the reason for their low political participation.
3. **Patriotism to and identity with a particular country is another point:** Political participation makes people realize their patriotism and identity with a particular country. It can make citizens feel or have a sense or spirit of identity and national belonging, which can lead to an open expression and an individual's independence or freedom in his own country, a feeling that the individual cannot have or express outside his own country (Egwu & Egwu, 2016:11).
4. **Acknowledgement of people's right:** People's participation in politics has helped in the acknowledgement of people's right. The "Dos and Do not's "are known in a particular political set up, organization or in a given country. People exercise their political rights either to be voted or to vote for others in their country.
5. **Political economic and social advancement:** This helps in the political, economic and social advancement of a country. For instance, the effort of

Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Sir. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and Sir. Ahmadu Bello, in the attainment of Nigeria's independence through nationalist movements, cannot be forgotten by the present citizens of Nigeria and those yet to come. Therefore, it is also used in other countries, such as Zambia, Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Dr. Nelson Mandela and Sam Njumona of South Africa. These people have helped their countries improve their political and economic histories and social advancement (Ubah, 2011:71).

6. **Another positive point relates to political making and implementation:** People's participation in politics has helped in policy making and the implementation of policy in a given country. The various strategic reforms in Nigeria include examples, e.g., the local government reforms of 1976, the National Policy to eradicate poverty, the policy on food security and the policy on universal basic education.
7. **Another issue is the elimination of corruption:** If corruption is eradicated, good people may become involved in politics as a means of correcting and building society. Since 1966, military people have entered politics as their main reason for overthrowing incumbent civilian governments (Chukwu,2010:41). Furthermore, Nigeria has had many military interventions to curb corruption, and in this democratic dispensation, many so-called Good Nigerians have gone into politics to save the country from its bad situation; many such people include Prof. Dora Akunyili, Prof. Ngozi Okonjo Iwuala, Governor Rochas Okorocha, Prof. Chukwuma Soludo, Former EFCC Chairperson (Rebadu), Mohammed Buhari, Senator Chris Anyanwu, and others.
8. **Self-actualization or existence is another point:** People participate in politics to let the world know that they exist. If you do not blow your trumpet, no one blows it for you. Those who want to be known worldwide participate in politics because some people are not hiding, and they must be aware of whether they are succeeding or not.

Socioeconomic and Cultural Challenges Affecting Effective Women's Participation in Politics in Nigeria

The challenges militating against women's participation in politics are manifold. In this work, several critical factors are examined:

1. Occupation: In view of Achike (2019), occupational prestige, as one component of SES, encompasses both income and educational attainment. Occupational status reflects the educational attainment required to obtain the job and income levels that vary with different jobs and within ranks of occupations. Additionally, it shows achievement in the skills required for the job. Occupational status measures social position by describing job characteristics, decision-making ability and control, and psychological demands on the job. Some of the most prestigious occupations are physicians and surgeons, lawyers, chemical and biomedical engineers, university lecturers, and communications analysts. These jobs, considered to be grouped in the high SES classification, provide more challenging work and greater control over working conditions but require more ability. Occupation is the most difficult factor to measure because so many exist, and there are so many competing scales. Many scales rank occupations on the basis of the level of skill involved, from unskilled to skilled manual labour to professional, or use a combined measure using the education level needed and income involved.

2. Discriminatory culture, religion, customs and laws: Women are discouraged from participating in public life from childhood through adulthood by authority figures such as husbands, fathers, mothers and other relations because the cultural image of a virtuous woman is defined as quite submissive and should be seen and not heard (Muoghalu and Abrifor, 2012). Therefore, partisanship is seen as ventures that are beyond the limit of societal expectation of a descent feminine behavior, thus leading to stereotyping. In view of Adefemi and Agunbiade (2019), these cultural orientations constitute disincentives for women's participation in politics. Similarly, religion is also used as an instrument of stereotype against women who venture into politics or as barriers to prevent them from public life. For example, Pudah, which is the restriction of women to their quarters predominantly in practice among Muslims in northern Nigeria, ensures that they are barred from participating in politics either as voters, aspirants or even as participants in economic activities. Likewise, the Christian faith also does not accord women with much of a role in public affairs. The customary practices of many contemporary societies are biased by subjugating women to men and undermining their self-esteem. The overall impact of gender bias, cultural norms and practices has entrenched a feeling of inferiority in women and placed them at a disadvantage vis-a-vis their male counterparts in the socio-political scene even in urban centers. These socially constructed norms and stereotype roles cause women to overplay their 'femininity' by accepting that they are 'weaker sexes', overemphasizing the dainty nature of their sex and regarding exceptional achievement as masculine. For example, most customs often prefer sending a male child to school rather than a female child, who is expected to nurture siblings and to be married. This marginally increases illiterate women and stiffens their competition with their male counterparts in politics (Damilola, 2010).

1. **Women's perception of politics:** Nigerians are awash daily with tales and news of dishonest and disreputable practices of some politicians. Thus, the common perception of politics is that it is a dirty trade that is reserved for people of questionable integrity who have little regard for the rule of law and due process. Therefore, women in politics are seen either as partners in crime or as abettors of the vile committed by the political class. To avoid the discolouration or blot associated with politicking, some women prefer to stay out or take a backseat.
2. **Political violence:** Political violence is another aspect that reduces women's participation in Nigerian politics. The involvement of thugs before, during and after elections (Kolawale et al, 2012) and the attendant insecurity, such as the destruction of lives and property, that characterize a typical electoral process in Nigeria make politics out-of-the-way for most women. A female aspirant, Dorathy Nyone, who described the tales of her personal ordeal, noted that "A ward chairperson was shot dead; all the women and most of the men fled the scene. My husband rushed there and took me home. I was scared; men who were fully prepared for the violence were the only ones who remained behind to hand pick the various winners" (Luka, 2011:32). While this tale typically illustrates electoral violence in Nigeria, the spate of political assassination, incessant political thugery and general violence have led female people to dread politics.
3. **Lack of self-confidence:** one of the major challenges facing women in politics and decision making is women themselves. Most women lack confidence in their own ability and capacity to lead. In most cases, they feel the game of politics is an exclusive reserve of men and dare not venture into it; those who manage to venture are usually content with the back seat. Similarly, many women do not have confidence in the

leadership abilities of their fellow women (Achike, 2019). Although factors such as envy, jealousy, and other problems associated with interpersonal relationships are common with women, generally, most women vote or support men to win elections rather than their fellow women despite their numerical strength. This has often given men an upper hand in regard to mobilizing support for elections. A classical example of this scenario was the case of Mrs. Sarah Jubrin, who contested against former President Goodluck Jonathan and former vice President Atiku Abubakar in PDP presidential primaries preparatory to the 2011 general elections. At the end of the exercise, Sarah Jubrin pulled only one vote—obviously an own vote. This shows that even her closest female supporters did not vote for her.

4. **Women's marginalization in political party leadership:** Most political party hierarchies in Nigeria are dominated by men. The relatively poor financial status of women in financing or supporting party activities has fundamentally limited their influence on political party structures. Hence, women are unlikely to be voted into key positions in the political party hierarchy. These also affect the extent of their powers and influence within the party structure. Thus, during party nominations, they are usually unable to assert themselves or even push for the interest of women leading to the marginalization of women during elections.
5. **Poor or low implementation of affirmative action:** Affirmative action is usually a measure intended to supplement non-discrimination; it is a broad term encompassing a host of policies that seek to support weak groups in society. They include policies where deliberate action is used to stop discrimination. A policy process of this kind allows for rules that have the objective of enhancing equal opportunity for individuals and improvement in the situation of marginalized groups (Chukwu, 2018). In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This convention has variously been described as the "Bible of women's empowerment" and "Women's International Bill of Rights." Since its adoption, it has become a reference point for women's movement in the demand for gender equality (Damilola, 2010).

The Convention "reflects the depth of the exclusion and restriction practiced against women solely on the basis of their sex by calling for equal rights for women regardless of their marital status in all fields - political, economic, social, cultural and civil; it calls for national legislations to ban discrimination, recommends temporary special measures to speed equality in fact between men and women" (UNESCO, 1999:6). The Convention provides the following:

"Adoption by States Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present Convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved. - Article IV, CEDAW".

The 1999 Constitution provided somewhat similar affirmative action to supplement the nondiscrimination of contending panics. The Constitution provides that:

"... the composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and command loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or any of its agencies."

Nevertheless, Nigeria has not been able to effectively implement affirmative action and enhance women's representation in politics and economic wellbeing.

Empirical Review

Some works have been done in related areas of this study.

Abiola (2019) examined women's political participation and grassroots democratic sustainability in Osun State, Nigeria (2010--2015). Studies on the representation of Osun State and women at both the federal and state levels and in the legislative and executive arms of government have indicated that it has the second highest representation of women in Southwest China, Nigeria. This study adopted a survey research design. Data were collected through questionnaires and unstructured interviews. A simple percentage was used for data analysis. The findings revealed that the number of women involved in political participation in Osun State is low compared with their male counterparts, yet they are beginning to make great strides. The women's representation at the two levels of involvement in the period under study was 50 women or 20.5% of the group, whereas the male representation was 244 or 79.5%. Furthermore, it was revealed that the underrepresentation of women in political participation in Osun State was due to certain sociocultural factors, such as violence, discrimination against women, people's perception of politics as a dirty game and cultural beliefs. Local policies are recommended to end all discrimination against women as well as a platform of action entrenched in the constitution.

Chukwu (2018) examined women's empowerment and political participation in Abia State (1999--2015). System theory and the theory of economic determinism were employed for the study. A survey research design was adopted, and a questionnaire served as an instrument for data collection (primary data). However, secondary data were sourced and used. The data collected are presented in tables and were analysed via simple percentage and chi-square tests. The results show that a low level of women's economic viability impairs their political participation, and women have a low social status, which affects their rate of political participation. Women's socioeconomic empowerment leads to active political participation. Our traditional practices/beliefs hinder women's political empowerment, the religious view/marginalization of women contributes to their low level of political empowerment, and the religious and traditional empowerment of women can increase their political involvement in Nigeria. It therefore recommends that women's political empowerment in Nigeria through constitutional reform is needed to promote a feminine political model against the historic and unyielding masculine model.

Achike (2019) focused on gender inequality and women's participation in politics: a critical evaluation in Nigeria. The study was carried out to determine the challenges affecting women's political participation in Nigeria. The researcher employed systems theory and the

theory of economic determinism to analyse the subject matter. A survey research design was used, and a questionnaire served as our instrument for data collection. The researcher sampled 180 respondents from the entire population, but out of 180 questionnaires distributed, only 170 were properly returned and used. The data collected are presented in tables and were analysed via simple percentage and chi-square tests. The findings revealed that gender inequality is a challenge that discourages women's political participation in the Nigerian cultural belief system and that a low level of education, social marginalization, and poor political culture are the challenges affecting women's political participation. Moreover, gender inequality is one of the problems contributing to Nigeria's low level of development. The Nigerian government, political leaders, and men in our society should reduce women's political marginalization, enhance gender equality and encourage women's involvement in politics in the country to achieve development.

Adefemi and Agunbiade (2019) appraised the participation of women legislators in the law-making process at the Houses of Assembly, Southwest Nigeria. It highlighted women legislators' challenges, experiences and contributions with a view to providing information on the representation and participation level of women in law-making in Nigeria. The survey method was used. Structured interviews were conducted with key respondents consisting of purposively selected women legislators, women leaders of political parties and members of the Houses of Assembly in Lagos, Ekiti and Oyo States. A total of 24 respondents were interviewed in the three states. The data collected were analysed via content analysis. The results showed that women legislators have been highly involved in legislative debates by sponsoring diverse motions in response to their low representation in the selected State Houses of Assemblies. Additionally, the results confirmed that factors such as the shunning of ideas and motions, a lack of equal knowledge of partisan politics, a lack of adequate education, discrimination, marriage, late night meetings and sittings remain some of the challenges that women legislators in Southwest Nigeria face. To overcome these problems, the study recommended the development of electoral reforms that promote the equitable representation of women.

Gap in Literature

Past studies have performed related work. However, most previous studies focused on political participation and women's empowerment without specifically focusing on women's socioeconomic status and political participation in Imo State. Moreover, some of the studies covered other states but did not pay attention to the Imo State. Some past studies did not even focus on the Nigerian environment but focused on other countries, neglecting both the Imo State and Nigerian environments. Moreover, the major variables employed in our objectives differ from those used in most of the empirical studies. These variables are used to identify the extent to which the income of women enhances their political participation, to determine the relationship between women's education and their level of political participation, and to determine the impact of women's occupation and their level of political participation. Thus, a research gap exists, and this study aims to fill the knowledge gap and contribute to further studies on this topic. This study focused on women's socioeconomic status and political participation in Imo State.

System Theory

System theory was proposed by Ludwing Von Bertalanffy, a biologist and mathematician, in the 1940s. Von Bertalanffy wrote that a system is a complex of interacting elements and that they are open to and interact with their environments. In addition, they can acquire qualitative new properties through emergence, resulting from continual evolution rather than reducing an entity (e.g., the human body) to the property of its parts or elements (e.g., organs or cells). System theory focuses on the arrangement of and relations between the parts that connect them into a whole. A system is a set of elements standing in interaction. A whole is composed of many parts and an assembly of all parts. It is necessary for all the parts to work.

According to Egwu (2007), in simple social science parlance, a system is a whole or an integral with structure and interrelated parts that function to maintain the continuity of their existence. To him, system theory sees society as being governed by mutually interrelated structures that, through possessing unique individualized characteristics and performing special roles independently, maintain a dynamic equilibrium between themselves for the successful maintenance of the entire system. A system is a whole with many components. Each component is independent of the other and performs different but interrelated functions. To him, all the components of the system work together for the maintenance and existence of the whole. Problems in any part of the system therefore affect other parts of the system. This is because each component is dependent on the other components.

Here, system theory was used as the framework of analysis. Here, if Nigeria must achieve sustainable development, women must be politically active. The Nigerian system, like other systems, is composed of males and females. The male has to balance political and economic opportunities to make women very active and effective in the system. When women are not considered, this affects the growth of the entire system and enhances development. Additionally, the problems in the Nigerian system today are based on male dominance. This is true because our system made it that men dominate Nigerian politics and that women are highly marginalized. Moreover, women are known for taking care of the family and not being active in political and economic ventures within the community, political party, church, or other social groups. Women's marginalization and low level of political empowerment are the result of activities and happenings in the Nigerian political system.

Justification of the Theory

The theory focused on the need to understand the behavior and inconsistent way of life of our political and economic leaders (including government institutions). In this vein, Nigeria has signed affirmative action in theory but has refused its implementation. During the time of its agreement, the government stated its pragmatic vision of women's empowerment and political participation. However, in reality, there is a very large vacuum between what these leaders promised and their practical performance in office, as it concerns women's political empowerment. There is also a very large vacuum between the "said" goal of establishing and signing affirmatives and the goal accomplished through women's representation, hence the issue of vacuum-filling theory.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study, a descriptive survey research design was used. This is because:

1. It enables a researcher to scientifically examine social variables or phenomena in their natural setting.
2. It enables the researcher to objectively describe the relationships that exist among the variables or phenomena so that they can be examined within their actual environment and within a defined time frame.
3. It enables a researcher to directly or indirectly show attitudes, feelings and dispositions of samples towards a given phenomenon.
4. This enables a researcher to generalize the results of the survey to the entire population.

Method of Data Collection

In this study, both primary and secondary data were used.

- a. Primary data:** In this research, a questionnaire was used to gather necessary and relevant data from the respondents. This method was used to minimize the problem associated with data collection and to ensure that the results from the respondents were reliable and

bias-free, as expected. To achieve greater cooperation from the respondent, the questionnaire was designed to sample the views of the respondent on the issue of the study. The questionnaires were distributed only to the respondents. The questionnaires were only closed-ended questions and were developed via a Likert system of strongly agreed-upon, agreed-upon, undecided, disagreed and strongly disagreed. The questionnaire was used because of its benefits and advantages in terms of easy data collection, data analysis and variable identification. The researcher first establishes a rapport with the respondent before administering the measuring instrument. The questionnaires were self-administered. The researcher distributed the questionnaire by herself and collected it after three hours to ensure a high percentage of return.

- b. Secondary data:** Secondary data were also used. These data were collected from different sources, such as newspapers, magazines and journals. Published and unpublished textbooks were also relevant. Their sources of collection were different libraries, which included the state library and personal libraries of individuals.

Methods of Data Analysis

In this study, the researcher used a simple percentage to analyse the respondents' responses to the subject matter. Additionally, the chi-square test is used to test the hypotheses. The data collected were presented and analysed via frequency tables. Hypotheses were tested via chi-square nonparametric statistics. Chi-square (X) analysis is a statistical tool used to establish whether there is any relationship between two variables. In the analysis, we look at the sets of data to evaluate whether the empirically obtained frequencies (observed) differ significantly

under a certain set of theoretical assumptions. It also reflects the amount of divergence between the observed (o) and expected (e) frequencies.

Population of the study

The population for this research consisted of 821 participants. It covers all 150 political party executives—50 each from the 3 major political parties (APGA, PDF, and APC) in Imo State and the entire Community Government Council (CGC) principal executive in the 671 autonomous communities in Imo State. In Imo State, there are 671 autonomous communities. Each autonomous community has 5 principal executives: the traditional ruler, the president general, the civil servant, the women leaders, and the youth leaders (**Source:** Imo State Ministry of Culture and Chieftaincy Affairs Owerri, Imo State, 2023).

The researcher used political party executives as part of the population because they are in a position to provide good answers to issues related to political participation. Additionally, community council executives in autonomous communities were used as part of the population because they are people who are physically involved in electioneering issues at different community levels and therefore can provide information on women and political participation. Therefore, our study population included 821 participants.

Sample Techniques

The sample technique used in this study is the purposive sampling technique. This sampling technique enables the researcher to select the sample on the basis of the suitability of the respondents to provide accurate information for the study. This enabled the researcher to select the respondents who were available and accessible during the time of questionnaire distribution.

Sample size

The sample for this study is 180. It comprises 40 political party executives and 140 community government council representatives.

Sample for the study

Categories	Population size	Sample size
Political party executive	150	40
CGC executive	671	140
Total	821	180

Area of the Study

This study used Imo State as the study area. In Imo State, 99% of the people are Christians and therefore belong to the Christian religion. The postal code of the area is 460. Imo State sits at the intersection of roads from Port Harcourt, Onitsha, Aba, Orlu, Okigwe and Umuahia (Wikipedia, 2022). Owerri consists of five villages, namely, Umuororonjo, Amawom, Umuonyeche, Umuodu and Umuoyima (collectively known as Owerri Nchi Ise). Geographically, Owerri has an area of ⁵⁸km² and a population of 127,213 according to the 2006 census. The people of Imo State are 99% Igbos, and they speak the Igbo language. The people are mainly civil servants, artisans and businesspeople.

Instrument validity and reliability

Validity: This enables the researcher to ensure the measurability of the research variables. The researcher used the face validity method. In this case, the research instrument was presented to the project supervisor and other experts in the department to ascertain whether the instrument of the test (questionnaire) actually contains the vital aspects of the study that need to be included in the test instrument. The suggestions and advice of the experts fully adhered to the final draft of the questionnaire before distribution.

Reliability: In this study, therefore, the researcher used test-retest reliability. Here, the researcher distributed the instrument to the sampled population, and after a two-week interval, the same instrument was administered to the same population. As a high coefficient of correlation was established between the first and second tests, we conclude that the instrument is reliable.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Questionnaire item 1: The education of women adds value to their level of political participation.

Table 1: Responses to whether the education of women adds value to their level of political participation.

Reponses	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly agreed	77	45.3%
Agreed	50	29.4%
Disagreed	23	13.5%
Strongly disagreed	20	11.8%
Total	170	100%

Source: Field survey 2023

The above table shows that 77 respondents (45.3%) strongly agreed, 50 respondents (29.4%) agreed, 23 respondents (13.5%) disagreed, and 20 respondents (11.8%) strongly disagreed.

Questionnaire item 2: The nature of political culture in Nigerian society is a factor that influences women's political participation.

Table 2: Responses to whether the nature of political culture in Nigerian society is a factor that influences women's political participation.

Reponses	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly agreed	50	29.4%
Agreed	77	45.3%
Disagreed	20	11.8%
Strongly disagreed	23	13.5%
Total	170	100%

Source: Field survey 2023

The above table shows that 50 respondents (29.4%) strongly agreed, 77 respondents (45.3%) agreed, 20 respondents (11.8%) disagreed, and 23 respondents (13.5%) strongly disagreed.

Questionnaire item 3: The nature of women's occupation contributes to their level of political involvement.

Table 3: Responses to whether the nature of women's occupation contributes to their level of political involvement.

Responses	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly agreed	60	35.3%
Agreed	40	23.5%
Disagreed	38	22.4%
Strongly disagreed	32	18.8%
Total	170	100

Source: Field survey 2023

The above table shows that a total of 60 respondents, 35.3% strongly agreed, 40 respondents, 23.5%, agreed, 38 respondents, 22.4%, disagreed, and 32 respondents, 18.8%, strongly disagreed.

Questionnaire item 4: The level of women's income adds value to their level of political participation.

Table 4: Response on whether the level of women's income adds value to their level of political participation.

Responses	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly agreed	70	41.2%
Agreed	59	34.7%
Disagreed	36	21.2%
Strongly disagreed	5	2.9%
Total	170	100%

Source: Field survey 2023

The above table indicates that 70 respondents, representing 41.2% strongly agreed, 59 respondents, representing 34.7% agreed, 36 respondents, representing 21.2% disagreed, and 5 respondents, representing 2.9% strongly disagreed.

Questionnaire item 5: Educational training has a significant influence on women's political involvement.

Table 5: Response to whether educational training has a significant influence on women's political involvement

Responses	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly agreed	50	29.4
Agreed	100	58.5
Disagreed	-	-
Strongly disagreed	20	11.8
Total	170	100%

Source: Field survey 2023

The table above shows that a total of 50 respondents (29.4%) strongly agreed, 100 respondents (58.5%) agreed, and 20 respondents (11.8%) strongly disagreed.

Questionnaire item 6: There is a significant relationship between financial involvement and women's political participation.

Table 6: Responses to significant relationships between financial involvement and women's political participation

Responses	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly agreed	60	35.3%
Agreed	40	23.5%
Disagreed	38	22.4%
Strongly disagreed	32	18.8%
Total	170	100

Source: Field survey 2023

The above table shows that a total of 60 respondents, 35.3% strongly agreed, 40 respondents, 23.5%, agreed, 38 respondents, 22.4%, disagreed, and 32 respondents, 18.8%, strongly disagreed.

Questionnaire item 7: Financial challenges hinder women's active political involvement.

Table 7: Responses to financial challenges hindering women's active political involvement.

Responses	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly agreed	60	35.3%
Agreed	40	23.5%
Disagreed	38	22.4%
Strongly disagreed	32	18.8%
Total	170	100

Source: Field survey 2023

The table above shows that 55 respondents, representing 32.4% strongly agreed, 45 respondents, representing 26.5%, agreed, 40 respondents, representing 23.2%, disagreed, and 30 respondents, representing 17.6%, strongly disagreed.

Questionnaire item 8: Cultural norms in Nigerian society are a factor influencing the level of political participation.

Table 8: Response to whether the cultural norm in Nigerian society is a factor influencing the level of political participation.

Responses	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly agreed	59	34.7%
Agreed	70	41.2%
Disagreed	5	2.9%
Strongly disagreed	36	21.2%
Total	170	100%

Source: Field survey 2023

Table 8 above indicated that 59 respondents, representing 34.7% strongly agreed, 70 respondents, representing 41.2% agreed. Five respondents (2.9%) disagreed, whereas 36 respondents (21.2%) strongly disagreed.

Questionnaire item 9: Women's political participation could be improved through reorientation and education.

Table 9: Responses to whether women's political participation could be improved through reorientation and education.

Responses	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly agreed	40	23.5%
Agreed	60	35.3%
Disagreed	32	18.8%
Strongly disagreed	38	22.4%
Total	170	100

Source: Field survey 2023

The above table shows that a total of 40 respondents, representing 23.5% strongly agreed, 60 respondents, representing 35.3%, agreed, 32 respondents, representing 18.8%, disagreed, and 38 respondents, representing 22.4%, strongly disagreed.

Decision rule

Since the χ^2 value calculated is greater than X^2 , that is, $9.68 > 3.84$, we accept the alternative hypothesis and reject the null hypothesis; hence, we conclude that women's educational level affects their ability to stand for an election.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant relationship between income and women's involvement in contesting elections. Egwu (2018) noted that finance determines the level of political involvement. Ubah (2011) noted that women's financial viability could encourage or discourage them from active political involvement.

In line with Hypothesis 2, this study revealed that women's educational level affects their ability to stand for an election. Okafor (2019) asserted that education affects every social activity of people. Luka (2011) noted that when women are educated, they take active part in politics.

Conclusion

The researcher has examined women's socioeconomic status and political participation in Imo State. The contributions of women's involvement and political participation in improving the well-being of society cannot be overemphasized. In Nigeria today, women play a great role in the family, community and nation at large. Therefore, if they actively participate in political activities, positive results may be obtained. However, the challenges of income/financial, education and occupation in most cases hinder women's political participation, which has made it possible that the Nigerian political system has become very unstable and inactive. This study therefore concludes that the achievement of good governance and development in Nigeria depends on the extent to which women are empowered to participate in politics.

Recommendations

The study recommended the following:

1. The income of women in Nigeria should be improved so that women can be financially viable to participate in politics.
2. Enlightenment campaigns should be given to families that will train their female children
3. I recommend that both national and state House of Assemblies in Nigeria should enact a law mandating political parties to feed women as flag bearers during general elections so as to enable them win and occupy top-positions in government.
4. Government of all levels should commence free and compulsory education to our Nigerian women from primary to tertiary institutions to enable them obtain pre-requisite qualifications that will enable them to occupy political position in government.

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