

Gender Gap in Youth Participation Empirical Evidence from Nigeria

Oluwaseun Ayomipo

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Tlou Ramoroka

Professor of Development Planning in the Department of Development Planning and Management, University of Limpopo, South Africa

Abstract

Electoral participation continues to be an issue of critical importance in Africa. Huntington's third wave of democracy is mostly made up of African countries that had achieved their independence and were ready to foster a new beginning. Worrying, however, is the backsliding of democracy on the continent. Many nations have experienced coups and the overthrow of governments, such as Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea. In addition, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Sao Tome and Principe have all witnessed failed coup attempts. However, countries like Nigeria, Zambia, and South Africa have been able to conduct elections that have largely been free and fair. Recent developments with democracy and participation on the continent necessitate scholarly contributions that can shed light on the performance of democracy in Africa, emerging trends, and possible democratic reforms, in order to further consolidate democracy on the continent. Based on these contextual factors, this article addresses an extremely important issue of political participation for both Nigeria and other African democracies, i.e. political participation. Despite its significance to the stability and sustainable development of Nigeria, with over 75 per cent of the population being youth, studies on the gender gap in political participation by the Nigerian youth are rare in the literature. This study was conducted among Nigerian university students a few days before the 2023 presidential election, to assess the level of political participation and the gender gap in terms of participation. The study adopted a quantitative research design using the survey method. Four hundred and fifty-seven students (45.3 per cent females) participated in the survey. The study results showed that a gender gap exists in terms of traditional political participation by students, social media political engagement, and willingness to vote. However, there is no gender gap in terms of interpersonal political talk and online information-seeking. The study concludes that a gender gap exists in terms of some types of political participation by Nigerian youth, although not in terms of all forms of participation.

Introduction

Political under-representation and under-participation by women is a global concern.¹ Gender equality in all spheres of life among the people on the continent is a top priority for the African Union (AU), which is putting in significant effort to achieve equality. The AU has adopted the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, which is aligned with global efforts to end gender inequality by domesticating the United Nations (UN) Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This commitment is in accordance with the 1995 Beijing Declaration. Despite the AU's efforts towards gender equality and the progress made, gender inequality in Africa remains an ongoing issue.² Just like the AU, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) recognises the gender gap in the political, economic, and social spheres of its member states and is very concerned about it. Despite the noble efforts to close the gender gap, the problem persists in Nigeria, especially in terms of political participation, which is the subject of this article. The Nigerian government has also awakened to the need to bridge the gender gap in terms of political participation and representation in the country, although some people doubt the government's sincerity. The country's electoral management body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), is leading the struggle to bridge the wide gender gap in the country's political participation.

The gender gap in terms of political participation by Nigerian youth deserves more scholarly attention. While many studies have been done on the gender gap in terms of political participation by Nigerian adults,³ scant attention has been paid to the gender gap in political participation by the youth in the country. This neglect is not good for the nation's political health, given that over 160 million (77 per cent) of the population are young people.⁴ The findings of the studies are used to frame policies and programmes to promote the political participation and representation of women. Policies and programmes do not produce desirable results among the youth, as the findings driving the policies and programmes do not represent them or their voices. The political behaviour of young people differs significantly to that of adults, and they deserve to be studied.

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to contribute to the literature and shape policy using empirical evidence on political participation by Nigerian youth. Specifically, it assesses whether the much-talked about gender gap truly exists in terms of youth political participation by Nigerian youth, or if this is just talk based on speculation or projection from non-scientific evidence. The study adopted the five-dimensional conceptualisation of political participation provided by Kim and Hoewe.⁵ The dimensions are traditional political participation, interpersonal political talk, voting, social media political engagement, and online political information search. The study assessed the frequency of participation in political activities by the, and if there are gender gaps in terms of the participation.

The article starts with the literature review, which provides a background on dimensions of political participation and on youth and gender political participation.

Literature Review

This section is presented in three sub-sections that focus on the dimensions of political participation, youth, and gender political participation.

Dimensions of Political Participation

Political participation has been a subject of study for many decades,^{6,7,8,9} and its definition and scope keep evolving and expanding. Basically, political participation is citizens' activities that influence politics and governance.¹⁰ The participation must be voluntary and not because of coercion or a requirement of the law. The impact on the state or government may be direct or indirect. Further, political participation can be institutional (involving a group of people) or individualised.¹¹ Institutional political participation can be further sub-divided into institutionalised or non-institutionalised. In the former case, a formally established organisation binds the group, such as membership of a political party.¹² In the latter case, people just group together to take political action, such as staging a protest (without institutionalising the group).¹³ New forms of political participation keep emerging that disrupt the concept and extend scholarly arguments on what constitutes political participation. For instance, the various forms of political participation engaged in via digital technology, especially online, are new realities in the field that add to the myriad traditional forms of political participation.¹⁴

Because of the different approaches to the conceptualisation of political participation, there is confusion about its measurement and, consequently, the empirical results generated from measurements. That is why some empirical studies say that young people do not participate much in political activities, while others say that young people participate a lot in political activities; and while this is confusing, both views can be substantiated with credible evidence.^{15,16,17} Those who posit that the youth have low political participation would show low levels of involvement in voting, political party membership, and raising funds for political purposes; while those who posit that the youth have high levels of political participation would show the frequency of their political engagement on social media, and searching for political information online.¹⁸ For instance, in a study conducted in 28 European nations, it was found that forms of political participation by the youth vary from country to country, and that the youth in countries that have had many years of democracy are more active than those from countries with young democracies.¹⁹

As a way forward in conceptualising and measuring political participation, in 2020, Kim and Hoewe developed a five-dimensional scale to measure it.²⁰ The scale is comprehensive, as it covers different forms of political participation. It was assessed for validity and reliability and found to be valid and reliable. The first dimension of the scale is labelled 'traditional political participation', which covers different forms of institutional political activities such as joining a political campaign, and raising funds for political purposes. The second dimension is labelled 'interpersonal political talk', which covers discussing politics with people in non-institutional contexts. The third dimension is 'voting'. The fourth dimension is 'social media engagement', which covers engaging in political activities online. And the last dimension is 'online information seeking', which covers searching for political information online.²¹

Youth and Political Participation

Nigeria's youth are increasingly involved in political activities, both online and offline. Some engage in constructive political activities, while others engage in destructive political activities. The not-too-young-to-run bill signed into law, the EndSARS protests, and the Permanent Voter's Card (PVC) registration campaign initiative of the INEC have motivated more of the youth to participate in politics in the last two general elections.²² In a study conducted among young people in Ekiti state, southwest Nigeria, it was found that young Nigerians consider voting in elections as an important and essential ingredient for a sustainable democracy.²³ Besides voting, frequent use of social media by young people predisposes them to engage in online political activities. In a study done among university students in southwest Nigeria, frequency of social media use by young people was associated with their political participation during the 2015 Nigeria general elections.²⁴ In a study done among young people in Benin City, South-South Nigeria, young people reported participating in the 2023 general elections through social media.²⁵ The growing political participation of the Nigerian youth is despite the challenges of poverty and discrimination against young people in politics and leadership, which discourage the youth from engaging in political participation.²⁶ Besides the youth playing a positive role in politics, some of the youth actively participate in political violence, and play a significant role in the acts of political thuggery and hooliganism that are seen. However, non-governmental organisations like the CLEEN Foundation and the West Africa Network for Peace Building are doing a great deal of work to re-orientate the Nigerian youth towards positive political participation.²⁷

Gender and Political Participation

Women's political under-representation and under-participation is a global concern,²⁸ Although the AU is putting much effort into ensuring gender equality in all spheres of life among the people on the continent.²⁹ For example, the AU has the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, which aligns closely with global efforts to end gender inequality by domesticating the UN CEDAW.³⁰ The AU also aligns with the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action through its commitment to gender equality and the progress made, although gender inequality in Africa still persists.³¹ Just like the AU, ECOWAS recognises the presence of a gender gap in the political, economic, and social spheres of its member states and is concerned about it.³² The AU has a Gender Development Centre, a Technical Commission on Gender, and a Gender Policy, which was adopted in 2005. It pushes gender affirmative action to close the gender gap in terms of political participation and representation, and conducts various workshops on gender mainstreaming.³³

Beyond the shores of Africa, the gender gap in terms of political participation by the youth persists. For example, in Germany, despite its long years of entrenching gender equality, a gender gap still exists in terms of political participation by the youth. A study conducted in 2019 among young Germans found that young men are more politically socialised than young women, and are more confident than young women of their capacity to participate in politics.³⁴ Similarly, in Malawi, there is a gender gap in youth political participation (2015 statistics).³⁵ The men are respected as leaders, while the women are respected as home keepers. In party

politics, the role of young women is entertaining people at political events as dancers, and there seems to be no concerted effort by the government at the political parties to bridge the gender gap.³⁶ A more recent study done in Kenya (2022) reported that despite the enabling laws aimed at enhancing gender equality in terms of political participation and representation, young women are still discriminated against in the country's masculine political space.³⁷ Limited funding and support for political participation and representation of women remains a challenge.

Disillusionment, deteriorating infrastructure, and rampant corruption have been identified as the key causes of marginalisation and limited political participation.³⁸ These challenges, instead of being isolated, serve to magnify the despondency among the cohort. In contrast, Johnson³⁹ and Obijuri⁴⁰ propose a different viewpoint, which emphasises the impact of the long-standing dominance of older men in the political arena, particularly in Africa, and their role in shaping politics and the overall political system. The 2022 ECOWAS report⁴¹ on political leadership reveals that West African democracies have mature political leaders in terms of age. However, African countries have been remarkably inclusive in terms of gender representation since 2010.⁴² Parliaments in countries like Botswana, Kenya, and Mozambique have witnessed a remarkable achievement, with women's representation of over 50 per cent.⁴³ Therefore, although disillusionment may impede participation, there are signs of increased engagement among young people and female voters.

In Nigeria the electoral management body (INEC) is also committed to addressing the gender imbalance in political participation in the country. INEC works to ensure the entrenchment of the Affirmative Actions and the Gender Policy Framework.⁴⁴ It also has a Gender and Inclusivity department and unit at the national and state levels, respectively. An increasing number of women participate in political activities in Nigeria.⁴⁵ They participate in political rallies and campaigns, and they vote. However, women who contest or win political seats remain low in number, and those who gain political appointments are very few.⁴⁶ Religious beliefs, cultural beliefs, socio-economic factors, and psychological factors in the form of a lack of identity consciousness to vote for a female candidate have been pointed out as factors responsible for women's low political participation and representation.⁴⁷ Also, a study that evaluated Nigerian politics between 1999 and 2019 found that inadequate funding, marginalisation, and political violence are also factors that deter women from participating in politics.⁴⁸ Some women are struggling through the masculinised political terrain, but they have not enjoyed favourable media coverage over the years. It seems the media deliberately hides women from the public and reinforces the notion that politics is a male domain. Not much space is given to women in the media, and not much is said about them and their political strides in the news. Thus, Nigerian media is allegedly implicated in women's political marginalisation.⁴⁹ Since the first Nigerian election in 1954 till the last election in 2023, the under-representation of women in both elective and appointive positions in the Nigerian government still persists. Women's neglect in politics has been blamed for the government failure that the nation is currently facing, as women are key to nation-building and good governance.⁵⁰

It is imperative that women in Nigeria receive more equitable treatment, particularly from the government, given that they comprise approximately 49.31 per cent of the country's

population and represent approximately 47.5 per cent of registered voters. Nigeria became a signatory to the UN CEDAW in 1985. And in 2006, the nation formed its National Gender Policy. Despite all the official efforts towards gender equality, cultural and political factors still make it a dream in Nigeria.⁵¹ While the Beijing World Conference on Women stipulates 30 per cent affirmative action, Nigeria's National Gender Policy recommends 35 per cent affirmative action. On paper, the 35 per cent shows an official commitment of the Nigerian government to bridging the gender gaps faster than the World Conference recommended. But, in practice, not much is being done to see the dream come true.⁵² For instance, the Maputo Protocol of the AU geared at promoting women's political and governmental participation and representation has not yet been passed into law in Nigeria, as the National Assembly has not ratified it.⁵³ Even in the National Assembly, there is gender disparity. The upper and lower chambers are dominated by men, and so is the leadership of the various statutory divisions. Not acceding to the reservation of seats for women has been blamed for the gender disparity in the Nigeria National Assembly.⁵⁴ To date, an effective legislative framework to enhance women's political participation is lacking in Nigeria. An electoral reform for equitable representation is needed, without which all other efforts cannot yield lasting results.⁵⁵

Improvement in women's levels of education and economic empowerment has been posited as capable of improving women's levels of political participation. However, there are opposing findings in the literature. In a study conducted among women in Kogi state, North Central Nigeria, to access the predictors of their levels of political participation, their educational levels, marital status, religion, cultural beliefs, and nature of occupation were found to predict their levels of political participation.⁵⁶ On the other hand, a study supported by the Institute for Democratic Study (IDS) (in the UK), which evaluated Afrobarometer findings on women's political participation in Nigeria, found that women in Northern Nigeria participated more in political activities than their southern counterparts. The study suggests that levels of women's education and their economic buoyancy are not predictors of women's political participation in the Nigerian context, as women in the southern part of Nigeria are, on average, more educated and economically buoyant than their northern counterparts.⁵⁷ Many studies have shown that the gender gap exists in the political participation of young people across different nations of the world.^{58,59,60,61} A study conducted among university students in Gombe state, North East Nigeria, concluded that there is a gender difference in young people's political participation.⁶²

Based on the reviewed literature on youth political participation, the gender gap in political participation, and the dimensions of political participation, the research questions and hypotheses in the next section guided this study.

Research Questions

1. How often did the university students participate in political activities leading up to the 2023 general elections?
2. What proportion of university students are willing to vote during presidential elections?

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1a: Male students worked more frequently on political campaigns than female students.

Hypothesis 1b: Male students called other people to raise support for a political organisation or purpose than female students.

Hypothesis 2: Male students discussed politics with other people more than female students.

Hypothesis 3a: Male students shared their opinion on a social/political topic on social media more than female students.

Hypothesis 3b: Male students posted political messages online more than female students.

Hypothesis 4a: Male students visited the websites of political parties or organisations more than female students.

Hypothesis 4b: Male students visited the campaign website more than female students.

Hypothesis 5: Male students are more willing to vote than female students.

Research Methods

The study adopted a quantitative research design using the survey method. The survey method was chosen because of its many advantages in eliciting unbiased quantitative responses, among other advantages. University students in one of the private universities in South West Nigeria was the population for the study. The volunteer sampling technique was used to select the sample. The choice of a survey, the university students, and the sampling technique were informed by the literature. Earlier, similar studies also used them⁶³ – justifying their suitability for the study.

The survey was conducted in February 2023 before the presidential elections. The students were told about the purpose of the study while in their classes, and those who consented to participate were given the questionnaire. To affirm their consent to participate in the study voluntarily, the participants first ticked the consent box at the top of the questionnaire before answering the questions. The consent box was labelled :I am willing to participate. The study's participants were given the liberty to only answer questions that they were willing to answer

and to leave out those they were unwilling to answer. They also had the liberty to pull out of the study anytime they were not comfortable with it any longer, without attracting any penalty.

A 26-item pen-on-paper questionnaire was used for the study. It had two sections, Sections A and B. Section A contained items on the demographic characteristics of the participants (age, level, gender, monthly income, religion, and state of origin). Section B contained items on different variables related to politics and elections in Nigeria. Two of the variables, political participation and willingness to vote in the presidential election, were analysed and reported in this article. The filled-out copies of the questionnaire were submitted to the researcher through the students' class representatives over some days after the questionnaire's distribution to the students in their classes.

Among the 457 students that participated in the study, (207) 45.3 per cent were females, while (250) 54.7 per cent were males. All of them were between 18 and 34 years old (Mean = 19.56; Standard Deviation = 2.0). The lowest age was 18 because that is the voting age in Nigeria. The median age was 19 years. The majority of the students (452; 99.8 per cent) who indicated their levels were undergraduates, while one (0.2 per cent) was a post-graduate student. Four students did not indicate their levels. The majority of the students (442; 96.7 per cent) were Christians; three (0.7 per cent) were Muslims, and two (0.4) were African Traditional Religion (ATR) adherents. Eight (1.8 per cent) students practised other religions besides Christianity, Islam, and ATR, while two did not indicate their religion. Among the 411 students who indicated their monthly income levels, 124 (30.2 per cent) earned below N30,000 per month, while 287 (69.8 per cent) earned above N30,000. Thirty thousand naira is the current minimum wage in Nigeria, which is why it is a reference point for the level of income measurement.

Measures

The scale used to measure the students' levels of political participation was adapted from the political participation scale developed by Kim and Hoewe in 2020.⁶⁴ The scale has seven items. The item asked the students to indicate the frequency of the following political activities in the past six months. Item (1) 'Worked on Political Campaign' and item (2) 'Called other people to raise support for a political organisation or purpose' measured the students' traditional political participation. Item (3) 'Discussed politics with other people' measured the students' engagement in interpersonal political talk. Item (4) 'Shared your opinion on a social/political topic on social media' and item (5) 'Posted political messages online' measured the students' political engagement on social media. Item (6) 'Visited websites of any political parties or organisations' and item (7) 'Visited a campaign website' measured the students' online political information seeking. Their response was graded on a 5-point Likert scale: Never (1), Rarely (2), Sometimes (3), Often (4) and Very often (5). The scale's Cronbach Alpha value was 8.31, suggesting that it was very reliable.

A questionnaire item was used to elicit the students' willingness to vote during the presidential elections. The question was: 'Which presidential candidate will you likely cast

your vote for in the 2023 general elections?’ The item had three options: ‘I will not vote’ (1), ‘Other candidates (Not APC)’ (2), and ‘Candidate of the ruling party (APC) (3).’ APC means All Progressive Party, which was the ruling party before the elections.

Data Analysis

Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 23 was used to analyse the data for this study. Frequency counts and percentages were used for the descriptive statistics, while the Independent-sample t-tests were used for the inferential statistics testing the hypotheses. Before the descriptive statistics measuring the students’ willingness to vote during the presidential election was done, the students’ responses were recoded. ‘I will not vote’ was coded as (1) while ‘I will vote for other candidates (Not APC)’ and ‘I will vote for candidate of the ruling party (APC)’ were recoded as (2). For the T-tests, equal variance was assumed. The section below presents the results of the data analysis.

Results

This study had two research questions and eight hypotheses. The data used to answer the two research questions were analysed with frequency counts and percentages. The results are presented in Table 1 and 2. The data used to test the eight hypotheses were analysed with Independent-samples T-tests. The results are presented in Table 3 and 4 below.

Research Question One asked: ‘How often do the university students participate in political activities leading up to the 2023 general elections?’ The results (Table 1) showed that the students never or rarely participate in traditional political activities, either by working on political campaign (89.9 per cent) or by calling other people to raise support for a political organisation or purpose (85.5 per cent).

Table 1: Frequency (%) of students' participation in political activities

S/N	Political Activities		Frequency of Participation (%)	
			Don't Participate (Never/Rarely)	Participate (Sometimes/Often/Very Often)
1a	Traditional political participation	Worked on political campaign	89.9	10.1
1b		Called other people to raise support for a political organisation or purpose	85.5	14.5
2	Engagement in interpersonal political talk	Discussed politics with other people	23.5	76.5
3a	Political engagement on social media	Shared your opinion on a social/political topic on social media	50.0	50.0
3b		Posted political messages online	69.9	30.1
4a	Online political information seeking	Visited websites of any political parties or organisations	68.8	31.2
4b		Visited a campaign website	79.6	20.4

In the same vein, the students do not or rarely participate in posting political messages online (69.9 per cent), visiting the websites of political parties or organisations (68.8 per cent), or visiting a campaign website (79.6 per cent). However, the majority (76.5 per cent) of the students participated in discussing politics with other people face-to-face, while half of the students (50 per cent) participated in sharing their opinions on social/political topics on social media.

Research Question Two asked: 'What proportion of university students are willing to vote during presidential elections?' The results (Table 2) showed that slightly below half of the students (44.6 per cent) were willing to vote in the presidential elections, while slightly above half of the students (55.4 per cent) were unwilling to vote. More female students (60.7 per cent) than male students (51.0 per cent) were unwilling to vote.

Table 2: Students' willingness to vote during the 2023 presidential election

Gender	Willingness to Vote (%)	
	Unwilling to vote	Willing to vote
Male	51	49
Female	60.7	39.3
Total	55.4	44.6

Hypothesis 1a predicted that male students worked more frequently on political campaigns than female students. The test results ($t = 2.48, p < .05$) supported it (Table 3). However, Hypothesis 1b, which predicted that male students called other people to raise support for a political organisation or purpose than female students, was not supported as $p > .05$. Since the two hypotheses were from items that measured students' traditional political participation, further analysis was carried out.

Table 3: Independent-samples T-tests for students' participation in political activities

	Political Activities			
		Male	Female	<i>t</i>
H1a	Worked on Political Campaign	1.40	1.22	2.48*
H1b	Called other people to raise support for a political organisation or purpose	1.57	1.42	n.s
H2	Discussed politics with other people	3.16	3.11	n.s
H3a	Shared your opinion on a social/ political topic on social media	2.61	2.29	2.63**
H3b	Posted political messages online	2.12	1.84	2.53*
H4a	Visited websites of any political parties or organisations	1.99	1.99	n.s
H4b	Visited a campaign website	1.70	1.65	n.s
H5	Willingness to vote	1.48	1.39	2.06*

Note: * means $p < .05$, ** means $p < .01$, n.s means ($t = 2.48, p > .05$) and thus not significant

First, the mean of students' responses on the frequency of participation in the two political activities was computed. Afterward, the differences in the means of the frequency of participation of both genders were tested. The results (shown in Table 4) confirmed that there is a statistically significant difference ($t = 2.37, p < .05$) in the students' overall traditional political participation.

Table 4: Independent-samples T-tests for traditional political participation

Political activity	Male	Female	<i>t</i>
Traditional political participation	1.48	1.32	2.37*

Note: * means $p < .05$

Hypothesis 2, which predicted that male students discussed politics with other people more than female students, was not supported by the results ($p > .05$).

Hypothesis 3a, which predicted that male students shared their opinion on a social/political topic on social media more than female students, was supported by the results ($t = 2.63$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 3b, which predicted that male students posted political messages online more than female students, was also supported by the results ($t = 2.53$, $p < .05$). Both hypotheses 3a and 3b concerned students' political engagement on social media. Since the results supported the two hypotheses, it can be inferred that male students engage in online political activities more than female students.

Hypothesis 4a, which predicted that male students visited websites of political parties or organisations more than female students, was not supported by the tests ($p > .05$). In the same vein, Hypothesis 4b, which predicted that male students visited campaign websites more than female students, was not supported by the tests ($p > .05$). Hypothesis 4a and 4b were both related to students searching for political information online. Since neither hypothesis was supported, it can be inferred that both the male and female students had similar levels of frequency of searching for political information online.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that male students are more willing to vote during the presidential elections than female students. The test results supported the hypothesis ($t = 2.06$, $p < .05$).

Discussions and Implications

The overarching goal of this study is to assess whether a gender gap exists in young people's political participation in the Nigerian context. This subject has not been given adequate attention in the literature despite its significance to the stability and sustainable development of the country. Nigeria has over 160 million young people, accounting for 77 per cent of the total population, with about an equal volume of male and female citizens.⁶⁵ However, studies on political participation have hitherto focused on young people without looking at the gender dimensions therein, and studies that focused on the gender gap in political participation and representation have hitherto focused on older women. Therefore, this study, focusing on the gender gap in the political participation of young people, provides findings to fill the gap in the literature. Specifically, the study assessed the students' frequency of participation in political activities leading to the Nigeria 2023 general elections, their willingness to vote during the presidential election, and whether or not their participation and willingness to vote vary with their gender.

The study was a survey carried out among students in a private university in South West Nigeria. The findings showed that the majority of the students only participated in discussing politics in face-to-face and online contexts; however, most of them neither sought political information online nor participated in traditional political activities such as joining a political campaign or raising support for political parties or purposes. Furthermore, most of the students were unwilling to vote during the presidential election, with female students being the majority among them. The study's findings suggest that the students' verbal expressions of their political views were not converted to actions.

Assessing the gender gap in the students' levels of political participation yielded mixed results. The study findings showed that the male students participated more in traditional political activities and online political engagements than the female students. They shared political opinions and posted political messages online more frequently. Also, the male students were more willing to vote than the female students. However, in discussing politics with people face-to-face and searching for political information online, there was no difference between females' and males' frequency of involvement. The study's findings suggest that female students participated in politics in safe spaces, with people they see face-to-face and quietly/anonymous online.

The findings of this study agree with the findings of many studies that conclude that young people do not participate much in traditional political activities (especially those related to party politics), including voting.^{66,67} However, in expanding the understanding of the political participation of young people, this study found out that young Nigerians have other dimensions besides traditional political participation and voting, wherein they participate. These dimensions are online information seeking, interpersonal political talk, and political engagement on social media. Interestingly, most of the young people participated in talking politics in face-to-face contexts, and half of them talked about politics online. That implies that it may not be safe to conclude that young Nigerians do not participate in politics. Instead, it might be safe to conclude that they do not participate in politics in traditional ways, but participate in non-traditional ways.

In the same vein, the findings of the study agree, partially, with the findings of many studies that conclude that there is a gender gap in political participation in Nigeria.^{68,69} However, the findings of this study suggest that there is a need to disaggregate 'political participation', especially as it involves young people. Breaking political participation into five different forms shows that only in three dimensions (traditional, social media engagement, and voting) are there gender gaps. In two of the dimensions (interpersonal political talk and online political information seeking), there are no gender gaps. This means that young women also participate in politics like the young men. The difference is in the spheres/domains of participation. While young men participated in open and risky domains, young women chose 'hidden' and safe domains. Therefore, it may not be completely true to posit that young Nigerian women do not participate in politics. Instead, it may be better to say that young Nigerian women participate in politics, mainly in hidden and safe domains.

The findings of this study have two implications for policy. First, the notion that young people do not participate in politics deserves a re-evaluation in light of the findings of this study, which show five dimensions of political participation. It seems the assertion is not totally true and somewhat misleading. Understandably, the assertion is based on studies conducted with a focus on non-voting traditional political participation and voting, wherein many youths neither participate nor show interest in participating. This article argues that young people participate in politics, majorly in non-traditional ways. And, for policymakers to have more youths participate in politics, more avenues for non-traditional participation should be open to them. Second, in the same vein, the popular notion that there is a wide gender gap in political participation deserves a re-evaluation. As the study's findings show, young women

participate in some dimensions of politics as much as young men: they talk politics with their neighbours and search for political information online. This paper posits that young women participate as much as young men in politics within safe and hidden spaces. This means that if political activities can be taken to safe and hidden spaces, more women will participate as much as men. Therefore, policymakers should promote online (only) political party membership and activities, and they should make policies to promote the adoption of electronic voting for eligible Nigerian voters during future elections. Such safe and 'hidden' platforms will solve the problem of the gender gap in political participation and representation in Nigeria.

Limitations and Conclusion

This study has three limitations. Firstly, its findings may be generalisable only to Nigerian university students and not to all the young people (age 18-35) in Nigeria. Secondly, the majority of the students who participated in this study are Christians and from fairly well-to-do families (as the majority of them earn above the minimum wage per month despite being students). Thus, the findings may not be generalisable to Muslim university students and students from poor backgrounds because religion and level of income influence Nigerians' political attitudes. Thirdly, because the study was conducted prior to (but close to) the presidential election, participation in voting could not be measured. The study measured the students' willingness to vote, which may not translate to the students' participation in voting during the presidential elections. Despite the limitations, the study contributes to knowledge about the gender gap in young people's political participation in Nigeria.

In conclusion, the study submits that young Nigerians participate in politics more with words than with actions, and there is a gender gap in their political participation. However, the gender gap is not in all forms of participation. Young women participate in politics as effectively as young men, but only within safe spaces (in their neighbourhood and online); therefore, if political activities are taken to safer and 'hidden' spaces (where women can maintain their anonymity to strangers as much as practicable), such as online spaces, the gender gap in political participation may be bridged to a large extent. Thus, policies to encourage women's political participation should not only target making women 'stronger' (more resilient/daring) to participate in Nigerian politics; policies should also be geared towards making Nigerian politics 'weaker' (safer) for women to participate in it.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations of the study, which are derived from the key findings:

- **Enhance political education by promoting online political engagement**

Encourage all-encompassing political education to raise students' knowledge and comprehension of political systems and the value of engaged citizenship. Political experts could give

workshops, seminars, and guest lectures. Encourage political conversations and activity among your students by using social media and online resources. To pique interest and encourage engagement, universities can host webinars, online forums, and interactive sessions with prominent politicians.

- **Encourage female political participation**

Identify and address challenges to political involvement that female students confront. Supporting organisations, mentoring programmes, and giving female voices a forum in political discourse are a few examples of how to accomplish this.

- **Strengthen student unions**

Enable student unions and political groups at the university to plan programmes, discussions, and other activities that encourage students to get involved in politics and become activists.

- **Promote voting awareness and encouragement**

Programmes that educate students the value of voting, how to register, and how to take part in elections should be implemented. Targeting challenges that may keep female students from casting ballots needs special attention. Furthermore, promotion of mentorship initiatives that facilitate the interaction of female students with politically engaged women is of importance. In addition to highlighting the significance of their votes, this can assist demystify voting.

- **Emphasise the importance of female participation**

Organise awareness-raising events on campus to highlight the value of female involvement in politics at all levels. To disseminate the word, use events, social media, and posters. Invite activists and politicians who are women to speak on campus about their experiences and the value of women in politics.

- **Policy development**

To guarantee that women's and young people's perspectives are heard during the policy-making process, develop councils or advisory boards with their representation. To ensure that there is sufficient representation, political parties and legislative bodies should implement and uphold quotas for women and young people. Nigeria can enforce stronger anti-discrimination laws to shield women and young people from discrimination and harassment in political settings. Furthermore, to find areas for improvement, the country can evaluate policies and initiatives aimed at boosting women's and youth participation in politics on a regular basis.

References

- 1 Ette, M., and Akpan-Obong, P. 2023. Negotiating access and privilege: Politics of female participation and representation in Nigeria. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 58(7), 2023, pp. 1291–1306.
- 2 González, O. M. 2018. The role of African institutions in promoting gender equality and the political empowerment of women. *International IDEA*, pp. 11–31.
- 3 Henry, J. U., Nwigwe, N. R., and Amoge, I. H. 2023. Women exclusion in Nigerian politics: A historical re-evaluation. *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies*, 16(2), December, 2023, pp. 784–804.
- 4 Duntoy, S. J., and Mbaegbu, R. 2023. Young Nigerians prioritise security, jobs, and the economy for government action. *Afrobarometer*, Dispatch No. 708, 29 September. pp. 1–11.
- 5 Kim, B., and Hoewe, J. 2020. Developing contemporary factors of political participation. *The Social Science Journal*, July. pp. 1–15.
- 6 Amupanda, J. S. 2018. Who is in the “we”? Interrogating the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and youth political participation. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies – Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity*, 13(1), July 2018. pp. 56–76.
- 7 Hooghe, M., and Stolle, D. 2004. Good girls go to the polling booth, bad boys go everywhere: Gender differences in anticipated political participation among American fourteen-year-olds. *Women & Politics*, 26(3/4), 2004. pp. 1–23.
- 8 Mattes, R., and Richmond, S. 2014. *South Africa’s Youth and Political Participation, 1994-2014*. Centre for Social Science Research, University of Cape Town, 2014. pp. 1–36.
- 9 Kitanova, M. 2020. Youth political participation in the EU: Evidence from a cross-national analysis. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(7), July, 2020. pp. 819–836.
- 10 Amupanda, 2018. Op Cit. pp. 56–76.
- 11 Hooghe and Stolle, 2004. Op Cit. pp. 1–23.
- 12 Kitanova, 2020. Op Cit. pp. 819–836.
- 13 Mattes and Richmond, 2014. OP Cit. pp. 1–36.
- 14 Weiss, J. 2020. What Is Youth Political Participation? Literature Review on Youth Political Participation and Political Attitudes. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 2(1), May, 2020. pp. 1–13.
- 15 Hooghe and Stolle, 2004. Op Cit. pp. 1–23.
- 16 Weiss, 2020. Op Cit. pp. 1–13.
- 17 Kitanova, 2020. Op Cit. pp. 819–836.
- 18 Amupanda, 2018. Op Cit. pp. 56–76.
- 19 Kitanova, 2020. Op Cit. pp. 819–836.
- 20 Kim and Hoewe, 2020. Op Cit. pp. 1–15.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 Ushie, B. O., and Zoaka, Y. A. 2022. Youths, Democratic Participation and the Nigerian Electoral Process in 2023: Prospects and Challenges. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 7(9), September, 2022, pp. 1810–1819.
- 23 Okaiyeto, S. A., Olaogun, M. S., and Oluwadele, L. B. 2021. Youth Perception on the Importance of Voting During Elections in Nigeria. *New Media and Mass Communication*, 95, March, 2021, pp. 75–80.
- 24 Onyechi, N. J. 2018. Taking their destiny in their hands: Social media, youth participation and the 2015 political campaigns in Nigeria. *African Journalism Studies*, 39(1), May, 2018, pp. 69–89.
- 25 Arijeniwa, A. F., and Nwaoboli, E. P. 2023. Setting Agenda for Public Discourse: Examining the Impact of Social Media on Political Participation amongst Nigerian Youths. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Approach and Studies*, 10(1), January-February, 2023, pp. 36–53.
- 26 Ushie and Zoaka, 2022. Op Cit. pp. 1810–1819.
- 27 Olanrewaju, O. 2022. Youth Participation in the Electoral Process and Electoral Violence in Nigeria: The role of NGOs in Mitigation Process. *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies*, 15(2), December, 2022, pp. 91–133.
- 28 Ette and Akpan-Obong, 2023. Op Cit. pp. 1291–1306.
- 29 Tiek, T.K. 2019. The African Union: successes and failures. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.703>.
- 30 Bamidele, R.O. 2013. *Gender Equality and the United Nations: Implementation of CEDAW in Nigeria and South Africa*. Doctoral dissertation, Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU)-Doğu Akdeniz Üniversitesi (DAÜ).

- 31 González, O. M. 2018. The role of African institutions in promoting gender equality and the political empowerment of women. *International IDEA*, pp. 11–31.
- 32 Bouchama, N., Ferrant, G., Furet, L., Meneses, A., and Thim, A., 2018. 'Gender Inequality in West African Social Institutions', *West African Papers*, No. 13, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/fe5ea0ca-en>.
- 33 Ugbe, S. T. 2020. Women's political representation: A review of frameworks and quotas in West Africa. Centre for Democracy and Development, ND, pp. 1–20.
- 34 Henninger, A., and Von Wahl, A. 2019. This train has left the station: The German gender equality regime on course towards a social democratic model (2013–17). *German Politics*, 28(3), pp. 462–481.
- 35 Lekalake, R., and Gyimah-Boadi, E. 2019. Political participation lags among African youth, especially women. Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 34.
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 Otterstedt, M. 2022. Female Politicians Claiming their Equal Rights Towards Political Inclusion: A Qualitative Study of hindrances towards women's political inclusion on a National and Devolved level in Kenya. Doctoral thesis, UPPSALA University.
- 38 Kariuki, J.M. 2018. The Link Between Marginalization, Poor Governance and Youth Instigated Conflicts in Nairobi, Kenya. Doctoral Thesis, University of Nairobi.
- 39 Johnson, D. (ed). 2023. *Rethinking Democracy and Governance: Perspectives from the Caribbean*. Taylor & Francis.
- 40 Obijuru, C.C. 2023. The politics of cultural tourism in Nigeria: People, culture, and power in the Calabar Festival. Doctoral Thesis, Brunel University London.
- 41 Onuoha, F.C., and Akogwu, J.C. 2022. Nigeria and the ECOWAS. Africa's International Relations in a Globalising World: Perspectives on Nigerian Foreign Policy at Sixty and Beyond, p. 143.
- 42 Gutiérrez-Martínez, I., Saifuddin, S.M., and Haq, R. 2021. The United Nations gender inequality index. In *Handbook on Diversity and Inclusion Indices* (pp. 83–100). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- 43 Bauer, G. 2012. 'Let there be a balance': Women in African Parliaments. *Political Studies Review*, 10(3), pp. 370–384.
- 44 Adenekan, A.O. 2022. Gender inequality and women's participation in Nigerian politics (2011-2019). Master's dissertation, İstanbul Gelişim Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü.
- 45 Ojo, O. 2022. Overview of Women and Political Participation in Nigeria (2015–2022). *Dynamics of Politics and Democracy*, 1(2), pp. 135–146.
- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 Maigari, A. M., Yelwa, M. M., and Aliyu, A. 2019. Women against women? Women's participation in Nigerian politics. *Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation*, 3, 2019, pp. 1–30.
- 48 Umeh, C. R., Ujunwa, M. D. and Eze, I. J. 2023. Gender Equality and the Challenges of Political Participation in Nigeria, 1999-2019: Drawing Lessons for Gender Balance in 2023 Election in Nigeria. *Ife Social Sciences Review*, 31(1), 2023, pp. 108–118.
- 49 Ete, M. 2017. Where are the women? Evaluating visibility of Nigerian female politicians in news media space. *Journal of Feminist Geography, Gender, Place & Culture*, doi:10.1080/0966369X.2017.1387104, October, 2017, pp. 1–18.
- 50 Henry, Nwigwe, and Amoge, 2023. Op Cit. pp. 784–804.
- 51 Bako, M. J., and Syed, J. 2018. Women's marginalization in Nigeria and the way forward. *Human Resource Development International*, doi:10.1080/13678868.2018.1458567, April, 2018, pp. 1–19.
- 52 Uwa, O. G., John, A. E., Daudu, B. O., and Oyewole, O. O. 2018. Political Participation and Gender Inequality in Nigerian Fourth Republic. *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration*, 6(5), October, 2018, pp. 22–38.
- 53 Eni, O., Nnam, M. U., and Azu, U. E. 2022. The right to participate in political and decision-making process under the Maputo protocol: Normative masculinity and Nigerian women. *The Age of Human Rights Journal*, 18, June, 2022, pp. 397–423.
- 54 Okechukwu, A. T. 2022. Party Politics and Gender Disparity in Nigeria's National Assembly from 1999 to 2019 General Elections in Nigeria. *International Journal of Innovative Research in Engineering & Multidisciplinary Physical Sciences*, 10(2), 2022, pp. 93–124.
- 55 Ushe, U. M. 2018. Participation of women in politics and leadership in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, 1(1), 2018, pp. 115–171.
- 56 Owoeye, G. 2021. Women's engagement in participatory politics of Kogi State, Nigeria. *African Identities*, doi: 10.1080/14725843.2021.1952853, July, 2021, pp. 1–13.
- 57 Oladapo, O. A., Atela, M., and Agbalajobi, D. T. 2021. Women's Political Participation and its Predictors in Northern and Southern Nigeria. Working Paper, 2021(548), February, 2021, pp. 1–43.
- 58 Amupanda, 2018. Op Cit. pp. 56–76.
- 59 Mattes and Richmond, 2014. Op Cit. pp. 1–36.
- 60 Owoeye, 2021. Op Cit. pp. 1–13.

- 61 Kitanova, 2020. Op Cit. pp. 819–836.
- 62 Fanny, K. R. 2022. Gender, Youth and Political Engagement Selected Universities in Gombe State, Nigeria. *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies*, 15(1), June, 2022, pp. 84–102.
- 63 Fanny, 2022. Op Cit. pp. 84–102.
- 64 Kim and Hoewe, 2020. Op Cit. pp. 1–15.
- 65 Duntoye and Mbaegbu, 2023. Op Cit. pp. 1–11.
- 66 Weiss, 2020. Op Cit. pp. 1–13.
- 67 Kitanova, 2020. Op Cit. pp. 819–836.
- 68 Agbalajobi, D. T. 2017. A Historical Perspective of Women Participation in Politics. *Ife Social Sciences Review* 25(2) 2017, pp. 33–47.
- 69 Fanny, 2022. Op Cit. pp. 84–102.