

# 1 Political Participation in Nigerian Democracy: A Study of Some 2 Selected Local Government Areas in Ondo State, Nigeria

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## 7 Abstract

8 This paper examined the extent to which the citizens are involved in political activities. The  
9 study adopted both qualitative and quantitative means of data collection. A questionnaire  
10 titled Political Participation Attitude Scale (PPAS) was the quantitative instrument used for  
11 the study. A Focus Group Guide on Political Participation (FGGPP) was used to obtain  
12 qualitative data. Three research questions were raised and answered in the study. The  
13 findings of the study revealed that 57

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15 **Index terms**— political participation, political activities, democracy, political culture, political participants,  
16 political apathy, election, focus group discussio

## 17 1 I. Introduction

18 he political stability and development of any political system is a function of the awareness and positive  
19 involvement of the citizens in civic and political matters. This is the reason why Appadorai (2004) posited  
20 that democracy demands from the common man a certain level of ability and character: rational conduct and  
21 active participation in the government. In Nigeria, political activities and transition programmes have been  
22 marked with turbulence, uncertainties and violence. Right from the First Republic, the Nigerian politics is  
23 characterized by greed, love of power, violence, assassination, thuggery and election rigging.

24 Violence has become synonymous with Nigeria's political culture such that virtually all elections held so far  
25 in the country are violent-ridden (Ojo, 2014). Although the Nigeria general election which was held in 2011 was  
26 relatively peaceful, however, it was also marked with some irregularities. According to Okpi Author: Department  
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28 ??2011), although the national assembly election held on Saturday, April 9 2011 has been appraised by many  
29 as successful, some cases of malpractices and violence recorded across the country threaten to dim light on  
30 democratic progress. During the election, there were reported cases of underage voting, distribution of money at  
31 polling centers, manipulation of voters' register, diversion of electoral materials, ballot box snatching, unlawful  
32 possession of firearms and other electoral offences. This political scenario engendered lukewarm political attitude  
33 and participation among some citizens.

34 In a political system, the citizens can be involved in the political process and decision making by joining  
35 political party, voting during election, participating in electoral campaign, community affairs and other political  
36 activities. The level and pattern of political participation of the citizens determine, to some extent, the success  
37 of the political system. In Nigeria, politics is seen by a number of people as a dirty game which must be avoided.  
38 This is as a result of the undemocratic tendencies, deception, violence and uncertainties that characterize the  
39 political system. Commenting on the political apathy displaced by Nigerian citizens during the 2011 general  
40 election, The INEC chairman, Professor Attairu Jega lamented:

41 That there exists voters' apathy in Nigeria is no longer contentious. Voters turnout in the just concluded general  
42 elections had provided a scientific and empirical evidence of the existence of voters apathy and disinterestedness  
43 of sections of the electorates in elections? This ugly scenario has implications for popular participation and  
44 governance. (Odebo, 2011. P.2) This is corroborated by the report of an interview conducted during the 2011

## 4 B) POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

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45 election. One of the respondents said "My father told me not to vote when I was leaving home. This morning,  
46 my father said I was wasting my time. He said all politicians were the same and it would make no difference".  
47 Statistical analysis of the 2011 general elections showed that only 35% of the registered electorates voted during  
48 the election. Commenting on this the INEC chairman expressed that the scientific evidence of poor turn-out of  
49 voters during the election was at variance with the belief that Nigerians The development and sustenance of true  
50 democracy in Nigeria depends, to a large extent, on the electoral system. The confidence of the citizens in the  
51 electoral system and their participation in the electoral process are requisites for the enthronement of responsible  
52 and democratic leaders. The success of the 2015 Nigeria general election requires transparent electoral process  
53 and mass participation of the electorates.

## 54 2 II. Objective of the Study

55 The objective of this paper is to examine the level of political participation in some selected Local Government  
56 Areas in Ondo State, Nigerian. The study also intends to discover the reasons for political apathy in Nigeria and  
57 to find out the extent to which the citizens trust and have confidence in their political leaders.

## 58 3 a) Democracy as a Concept

59 The term democracy is derived from two Greek words: demos which means people and kratos which means rule.  
60 Literarily, democracy means 'rule by the people' Appadorai (2004) described democracy as a system of government  
61 under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives periodically elected  
62 by them. In the ancient states, direct democracy was possible because all adult members of the community could  
63 easily take part in decision making. Population growth and expansion in political boundaries have made direct  
64 democracy impracticable in the modern political system. This is the reason why representative democracy has  
65 replaced direct democracy in different parts of the world. Representative democracy is an indirect democracy  
66 where sovereignty is held by the people's representatives. Watter Lanqueur cited in Idowu (1998) pointed out  
67 that although the conditions of modern state make direct participation of all the people in government of the  
68 state impossible, the concept of democracy still emphasises the rule of the people. That is, the sovereign power  
69 is indirectly exercised by the people through a system of representation.

70 Consequently, political participation, particularly in the electoral process, is a fundamental requirement of  
71 representative democracy. This is the reason why Appadorai (2004) argued that where, on account of an  
72 atmosphere of fear and coercion, people do not feel free to discuss or vote, democracy cannot be said to exist, even  
73 though the other political rights are enjoyed by the people. Sovereignty (2010) identified some of the requirements  
74 of democratic rule as: at least two party system to give room for freedom of choice; periodic election that is based  
75 on universal adult suffrage; free and fair election to allow the political party that has the support of the majority  
76 to control the machinery of government and civil liberties such as freedom of association, religion, speech and  
77 freedom from arbitrary arrest.

78 Representative democracy rests on the assumptions that the citizens possess and demonstrate some civic  
79 capacities. These civic capacities involve three qualities: intelligence, self-control and conscience. The citizens  
80 must be able to understand the interest of the community, to subordinate his own will to the general will and  
81 must feel his responsibility to the community and be prepared to serve it by voting (Appadorai, 2004). In  
82 the contrary, indolence, indifference and political apathy have hindered the entrenchment and sustenance of  
83 representative democracy in Nigeria. Falade and Orungbemi (2010) argued that true democratic governance  
84 is absent in Nigeria and many parts of Africa. The political culture in Nigeria is characterized by intolerance,  
85 intimidation, thuggery, assassination, bitterness, apathy, indolence, money and ethnic politics. As a result of this,  
86 the ingredients of democracy have not been able to thrive after many years of political independence in Nigeria.

## 87 4 b) Political participation in Nigeria

88 Political participation is the involvement of the citizens in the political system. Eakin cited in Adelekan (2010)  
89 described political participation as the process through which the individual plays a role in the political life  
90 of his society and has the opportunity to take part in deciding what common goals of the society are and the  
91 best way of achieving these goals. According to Akamare (2003) political participation is an aspect of political  
92 behaviour and it focuses on the way in which individuals take part in politics. It is a voluntary activity and one  
93 may participate directly or indirectly. The various ways by which the people can be involved in the political  
94 system include selection or election of political leaders, formulation of policies, community activities and other  
95 civic engagements.

96 According to Awolowo and Aluko (2010), the essence of political participation in any society, either civilized or  
97 primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and to influence decision making. Political participation  
98 is a means of contributing ones quota to the political system and overall development of the nation. Political  
99 participation is one of the fundamental requirements of democratic governance. This is the reason why Adelekan  
100 (2010) emphasized that ideally, democracy means individual participation in the decisions that involves one's life.  
101 In a democratic system, there is the necessity for the citizenry to be fully involved in the democratic procedures  
102 of the choice of rulers and effective communication of the public policies and attitudes. Any claim to democratic  
103 regime or state must essentially embrace a high degree of competitive choice, openness, and enjoyment of civic

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104 and political liberties and political participation that involves all groups of the society (Arowolo and Aluko,  
105 2010).

106 The extent to which people participate in the political system differ from person to person. Falade (2008)  
107 identified six types of political participants. These are: The inactive: These are the people that take no part in any  
108 political activity Voting specialists: These are the people that get eagerly engaged only in voting. Besides voting,  
109 they are not concerned about other political activities. Parochial participants: These people participate in politics  
110 occasionally. They vote or get involve in any other political activity only when it affects their personal interest.  
111 The communalist: These are those who get engaged in voting regularly, they also get involve in community  
112 affairs but they are not involved in political campaign activities The campaigners: They are actively involved  
113 in political campaign but inactive in other community affairs. Complete activists: They are highly involved in  
114 all political activities. They actively participate in voting, political campaign, community activities and make  
115 contact with public officials. Some of the factors that determine political participation are: cultural, economic,  
116 political, religious and educational backgrounds of individuals. Also, the level of political awareness as well as  
117 the measure of confidence in the political process determines the extent to which the citizens participate in the  
118 political system. In Nigeria, politics is influenced by money, ethnic and religious factors. Since independence in  
119 1960, religious and ethnic politics characterize electioneering process in Nigeria. This is the reason why Albert  
120 Legogie, former deputy Senate President, pointed out that it was clear from the trend of the election that there  
121 was a big gulf, a dichotomy between the north and the south and between Christians and Muslims (Adeyemo,  
122 2011). For instance, during the post-presidential election violence in the Muslim dominated northern part of  
123 Nigeria, southerners and Christians were attacked and killed while many churches were burnt. Falade, (2007)  
124 expressed that politics in Nigeria is regarded as a dirty game and it is practiced with bitterness, hatred, rancor  
125 and other associated evils. The outcome of this is that Nigeria is in vicious cycle of political crises and instability.

126 Deceit and unfulfilled promises by political leaders discouraged a number of Nigerians from participating in  
127 election and other political activities. Falade (2008) argued that politicians make series of promises during  
128 election campaign. Most of these promises are not fulfilled after they had been voted in to power. As a result of  
129 this, some voters loose interest in election. One of the respondents interviewed during the 2011 election expressed  
130 that "I have come to the sun to suffer even though I am not benefiting anything from the government?I don't  
131 even have confidence in them because they have been failing us generally" (Adelakun, 2011).

132 There is low level of political participation among the Nigerian citizens. Many Nigerians are indifferent in  
133 political matters. The INEC noted that Nigerians' participation during the last general election in the 2011  
134 was low. Only 35% of the 70 million registered voters took part in the election. The Friedrich Elbert Stiffing  
135 Foundation conducted a research on the 2011 election and identified lack of transparent elections, election violence  
136 and politicians' noncommittal to their campaign promises as major reasons for voters' apathy in the country  
137 (Odebode, 2011).

138 The political apathy in Nigeria is based on the twin problems of ignorance and deliberate deception by  
139 some politicians. The consequence of this is the inability of the masses to have a link between their state of  
140 underdevelopment and their non participation in the electoral process ??Fabiye, 2010). In the light of this Falade  
141 (2007) concluded that the Nigerian political culture has not given room for the entrenchment and sustenance of  
142 true democracy. Awolowo and Aluko(2010) expressed that the low level of political participation of the Nigerian  
143 women is becoming alarming and disturbing. Since the emergence of political independence in 1960, the Nigerian  
144 women have remained invisible in the political process. The 1985 Beijing declaration to which Nigeria is a  
145 signatory provides that 30% of all positions in government should be given to women. This policy is yet to  
146 be implemented in Nigeria because there is a continuing trend of male domination of political and other public  
147 positions ??Oloyede, 2004;Adelekan, 2010).The marginal involvement of African women in the political process  
148 results from the lingering inhibitive cultural and patriarchal forces against women's engagement in politics that  
149 characterized African traditional societies (Chuku, 2009).

## 150 5 III. Methodology a) Research Design

151 This study is descriptive in nature. The survey design is used in the conduct of this research. Both qualitative  
152 and quantitative approaches were adopted to obtain the data used in the study.

## 153 6 b) Subject

154 The qualitative data was obtained through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and interview. Twenty (20)  
155 participants were involved in the focus group activities. Participants were selected from four different local  
156 government areas in Ondo State. The criteria for the selection of participants are: gender, occupation, age, local  
157 government area, and education. Five (5) participants from each local government areas were involved in the  
158 FGD.

159 Also, one hundred (100) subjects were used to gather the quantitative data. The subjects were randomly  
160 selected from thirteen (13)

### 7 c) Instrument

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Two instruments were designed and used in the study. The first instrument is a questionnaire used for quantitative data. The questionnaire is titled Political Participation Attitude Scale (PPAS). This questionnaire is made up of two sections. Section A is concerned with personal information while section B is made up of 23 items on the attitude of the citizens to politics and their involvement in the political process. The second instrument titled Focus Group Guide on Political Participation (FGGPP) was used for qualitative data. The FGGPP was designed to elicit participants' responses on their attitude to politics and the level of their involvement in political activities. Both instruments were given expert validity.

### 8 d) Research Questions

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The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. Will the subjects demonstrate high level of political participation in the democratic process? 2. Will there be higher level of political participation among the male than female? 3. Do the citizens have trust and confidence in their political leaders?

### 9 e) Analysis of Data

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The research questions raised for this study were given both qualitative and quantitative analyses.

### 10 f) Qualitative

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The Focus Discussion and interview were recorded and transcribed. The report of the interview and discussion showed that all the participants registered for voting and had voters' registration cards. However, 90% of the participants did not cast their votes during the general election. Some of the reasons why they abstained from election were: the thuggery, chaotic and violent situations that characterized the voting centers; distance and no means of transportation; names not found on the voters register and lack of confidence in the electoral process. The report of the FDG also revealed that male participants were more politically conscious than their female counterparts. 65% and 50% of males and females respectfully were aware and could clearly state some of their human rights. Generally more than 70% of the participants had no access to the Nigerian constitution.

Again, it was discovered that the participants were not involved in the process of decision making. All the participants responded that they were not involved in decisions that affect their own lives. They also pointed out that even when their opinions were sought, their feelings and needs were not reflected in political decisions and policies. More than 80% of the participants expressed that they had no confidence in the political leaders. They observed that political leaders are corrupt and selfish; they are not honest, transparent and trustworthy.

### 11 g) Quantitative Analysis

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The quantitative data obtained in this study are analyzed on the basis of the research questions that were generated.

Research Question 1: Will the subjects demonstrate high level of political participation in the democratic process? 1 shows that only 43% of the participants were highly involved in political activities; 50% always cast their votes; 54% played some roles in politics; 69% responded that the Nigerian democracy does not give room for mass participation; 89% believed that there are stringent conditions required for taking part in Nigerian politics and 59% responded that their parents/ relations are not in support of their playing politics.

Research Question 2: Will there be higher level of political participation among male than female members of the community? )

Year 2014

Table 2 presents the gender analysis of the number of people that agreed with some statements in the questionnaire. 30% of males and 13% of females responded that they were highly involved in political activities. Also 38% and 12% of males and females respectively were always involved in voting exercise.

Research Question 3: Do the people have confidence and trust in their political leaders? Political leaders are responsive to the needs of the people 30 30 70 70

Table 3 reveals that 47% of the respondents had confidence in their leaders while 53% did not trust their political leaders. 88% responded that political leaders were not used to fulfilling their promises after electioneering and 70% responded that political leaders were not responsive to the needs of the people.

## 12 IV. Discussion

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The findings of this study showed that there was low level of political participation among the sampled respondents. Only 43% of the people were highly involved in political activities. Also, just half, that is, 50% of the people regularly cast their votes. These findings are corroborated by the qualitative report that the participants merely registered and got voters registration cards. Just about 10% of those who participated in the qualitative study did cast their votes during the 2007 gubernatorial election in Ondo State. This finding is further corroborated by the Friedrich Ebert Stiffing Foundation's analysis of the 2011 general election that just 35% of registered voters took part in the election. The non-participation of most registered voters in the

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217 2007 voting exercise in Ondo State as well as the 2011 general election in Nigeria is an obstacle to democratic  
218 governance.

219 This political apathy is one of the factors responsible for electoral fraud and manipulations by desperate  
220 politicians. For instance, in preparation for electoral fraud during the April 2011 general election, politicians  
221 were reported buying up voters' card at the rate of ten thousand naira (#10,000.00) per card. Some of the victims  
222 of this dubious act were famished and politically indifferent people in some parts of the country including Kwara,  
223 Kano, Rivers, Katsina, Adamawa and Bayelsa states (Agbo, 2011). The failure of registered voters to participate  
224 in voting exercise during the election is an obstacle to democratic governance. This is because non-participation  
225 in the electoral process is a means of installing bad and unpopular leaders.

226 This study also revealed that there was effect of gender on political participation. More males (30%) than  
227 females (13%) were highly involved in political activities. Again, more males (38%) than females (12%) were  
228 regularly involved in voting exercise. ??lojede (1990) pointed out that although the Nigerian constitution permits  
229 women to take part in the political life of the nation, however evidence shows that women's role in politics has  
230 been peripheral. The participation of women in Nigerian politics is mostly limited to membership of women's wing  
231 of political parties, clapping, dancing, and cooking for the men at political rallies and party meetings (Akanke,  
232 2002). Arowolo and Aluko (2010) reported that women usually face massive resistance from participating in  
233 politics. They discovered that only 39.7% of husbands could allow their wives to participate in politics. They  
234 also discovered that a lot of female respondents believed that politics would prevent them from taking absolute  
235 care of their families. Hence the fear of broken homes, breeding irresponsible children and need to perform their  
236 domestic activities were identified as major reasons preventing women from going into politics.

237 The findings of this study showed that majority of the respondents (53%) did not trust their political leaders.  
238 53% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that political leaders were trustworthy. This finding is  
239 further supported by the qualitative report that more than 80% of the participants expressed that they had no  
240 confidence in their political leaders. The findings of this study are in agreement with previous finding of Mattes,  
241 Keulder, Chikwana, Afirca and Davids (2003) that popular trust in political institutions remains at relatively low  
242 levels. Mattes et al (2003) investigated the extent to which South Africans trusted their leaders. They discovered  
243 that just over one third (37%) trusted the president and just under a third (31%) trusted the parliament. One  
244 quarter (28%) trusted provincial government; Premier, (28%) and Local Government, (24%).

245 The findings of this study revealed that the way politics and governance are practiced in Nigeria discourage  
246 some people from political participation. According to Ojo (2014) between 1960 and 2011, Nigeria had conducted  
247 several general and regional elections. A survey of the political history of post independence Nigeria shows that  
248 these elections were marred by electoral violence as they were not conducted in atmosphere of electoral security.  
249 Adekunle (2007) The relative political peace that characterized the 2011 general election accounted for better  
250 political involvement of the electorates. For instance during the 2011 election, many young and old people who  
251 were first time voters trooped out to vote. For many of them, they deliberately passed up the opportunity in  
252 1999, 2003 and 2007 (Adelakun, 2011). However, findings revealed that even with the reported cases of first time  
253 voters during the 2011 election, only 35% of registered voters participated in the election. This implies that there  
254 is still much to be done to ensure that most registered voters participate in the 2015 general election. This is the  
255 only means of electing the right candidates and entrenching true democratic governance in Nigeria.

256 One of the questions that arise from the findings of this study is "How democratic is the Nigerian political  
257 system?" During the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections, the electoral process was not free and fair. It was marked with  
258 manipulations, violence, intimidation, ballot stuffing, fraud and allocation of figures (Adebanjo, 2003). That is,  
259 those who got to the political offices were elected by minority voters and through fraudulent practices rather than  
260 through transparent and majority votes. In the case of the 2011 election, the elected executives and legislative  
261 members were voted in by less than 35% of the electorates. Falade, (2008) argued that any government that is  
262 not voted in by the majority of the electorates is not representative.

## 263 13 V. Conclusion

264 There is low level of political participation in Nigeria. Many Nigerians are not committed to the electoral  
265 process and other political engagements. This study revealed that the Nigerian political system and act of  
266 governance do not encourage mass participation. This is because of the political culture of violence, intimidation,  
267 manipulation, sentiments, money politics, ignorance, corruption, deception and apathy that characterize the  
268 political system. There is marginal involvement of the Nigerian women in the political process. Cultural issues,  
269 domestic responsibilities, financial constraints and political indifference are some of the factors preventing women  
270 participation in politics.

271 This study also showed that Nigerians do not have trust and confidence in their political leaders. Most political  
272 leaders were found to be selfish and not responsive to the needs of the citizens. Political leaders made promises  
273 that were never fulfilled after gaining political power. Democratic and responsible governance have not been  
274 entrenched into the Nigerian political system. education in Nigeria. Political education should not be limited to  
275 the school system. Both formal and informal approaches should be adopted to orientate the citizens on the need  
276 for active participation in the political system. There is the need for mass political enlightenment through the  
277 media, adult education programme and civil associations. The citizens should be conscious of the danger of their  
278 political apathy.

279 There is also particular need for greater emphasis on girl child education. This will help to erase the traditional  
 280 gender stereotypes that have affected women involvement in politics. The women fold need to be intellectually  
 281 empowered as a means of reducing the problem of gender inequality in the Nigerian society. Girl child education  
 282 can be promoted through enlightenment campaign and financial support by Governmental and Non Governmental  
 283 Agencies.

284 Lastly, the Independent National Electoral Commission should put in place machinery that will ensure mass  
 285 participation of the electorates during the Nigeria 2015 general election. INEC should be more transparent  
 286 and impartial at every stage of the electioneering process. The electoral process should be devoid of sentiment,  
 287 favoritism, fraud, violence and intimidation. Any one who violates electoral procedure and policies should  
 288 immediately be brought to book. This will help to install sanity and confidence in the electoral process and  
 289 thereby enhance political participation.

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Figure 1:

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S/N	ITEMS	AGREE	DISAGREE
1	I am highly involve in political activities	43	57
2	I vote always	50	50
3	I play some roles in politics	54	46
4	Nigerian democracy gives room for mass participation	31	69
5	There are stringent conditions required for taking part in Nigerian politics	87	13
6	My parents/ relations are in support of my playing politics	41	59

Table

Figure 2: Table 1 :

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S/N	ITEM	AGREEMENT	MALE%	FEMALE%		
1	I am highly involved in political activities	43	30	30	13	13
2	I vote always	50	38	38	12	12

Figure 3: Table 2 :

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S/N	ITEMS	AGREEMENT	DISAGREEMENT		
1	Political leaders are trustworthy and dedicated to the needs of the community	47	47	53	53
2	Political leaders usually fulfill their promises after electioneering	12	12	88	88
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Figure 4: Table 3 :

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<sup>1</sup>Political Participation in Nigerian Democracy: A Study of Some Selected Local Government Areas in Ondo State, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>© 2014 Global Journals Inc. (US) Political Participation in Nigerian Democracy: A Study of Some Selected Local Government Areas in Ondo State, Nigeria

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