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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ATTITUDE TOWARDS POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AMONG WOMEN IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

The political landscape of Nigeria and the world, in general, has witnessed a declined presence of women in the system. The trend has generated considerable concern from numerous scholars. However, a growing intimation suggests that women are currently making headways to politics. This development is evident in the political arena of southeast Nigeria. Thus, the paper's purpose was to explore the overall attitudes of women in the southeast towards political participation. Five hundred and sixteen women were randomly pooled from different locations in three southeast states to participate in the study. The respondents completed a self-report measure of attitude towards political participation. The result indicates that a majority of the respondents, 78.3% with MD=0.98, showed a positive attitude towards political participation than 21.7% of their counterparts. It concluded that attitude is an essential component in the women-politics relationship. It is recommended that women be supported to participate in political business.

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Introduction:-

Over the years, women's engagement in the democratic political ecosystem has been an issue of global concern. Participation in politics reflects a critical factor of empowerment that generates consciousness about women's rights (Baker, 2018; Khan & Shah, 2020). However, the low participation of women in politics and governance has been a concern in every society (Anyango et al., 2018; Asekere, 2020; Hamidu et al., 2018; Indriastuti, 2018; Kasomo, 2012; Maphosa et al., 2015; Marwah, 2019; Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019; Nwabunkeonye, 2014; Okeke, 2015; Olufunke, 2013). The trend has led to a decline in women's involvement in politics. Perhaps, the political settings are predominantly considered a unique domain for men (Ibrahim & Mussarat, 2015; Jakešević & Luša, 2021). Conversely, women have been a great source of support to the enthronization of political leaders in many societies due to their numbers and nature (Joy et al., 2021). Consequently, they remain seriously underrepresented in decision-making positions (Ameen & Student, 2018; Dim & Asomah, 2019). Perhaps, the non-involvement of women in politics has been identified as one of the key impediments to economic development (Orisadare, 2019). Conceivably, the poor participation of women in politics describes the low patronage of their concerns in development and institutional capacities. The United Nations (1995) Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action agreed for balanced political participation and power-sharing between women and men in decision-making. Consequently, many countries are yet to attain a settled gender balance.

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The political landscape of Nigeria is generally characterized as a men's business in that men primarily occupy the political arena. For example, there are only seven women senators amid 109 senators and 22 women in the group of 360 House of Representatives members in the current political dispensation in Nigeria. Perhaps, the majority of women are not interested in the political business. Nevertheless, research suggests that women are less attracted to political business, less likely to follow political events, and more pessimistic about their competencies to be influential in politics (Wolak, 2020). Although, the National Gender Policy (NGP) of Nigeria endorsed 35% affirmative action and sought a more all-encompassing representation of women with at least 35% for the elective and appointive posts (Oloyede, 2016). Even with the large population of women in Nigeria and their contribution to the development and sustenance of the society (Odionye, 2016), their participation in decision making and general political processes is relatively decreased compared to men (Abubakar & Ahmad, 2014). The women's inability to actively participate in the political business of Nigeria has further reinforced the political gender gap and the perception of women as predominantly overseers of domestic chores.

The poor women's engagement in politics has been attributed to several factors. For instance, discrimination and religiosity have widely restricted women from participating in active politics in the Nigerian context (Agishi, 2014; Ibrahim, 2014; Nwabunkeonye, 2014). Similarly, gender disparities (Azuh & Egharevba, 2014; Etor et al., 2013; Karubi & Wasudawan, 2020), political violence (Akpan, 2018), stigmatization (Suleiman, 2017), political support (Eme & Onuigbo, 2015), godfatherism (Okooji-Simbine, 2012), quota system (Nelson, 2012), political knowledge (Badawi, 2007), and socio-cultural factors (Innocent et al., 2014) have been implicated in women lack of interest in the Nigerian politics. However, attitudes are an essential behavioral determinant that has not much research attention relative to women-political engagements.

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

Although the poor participation of women in politics is pervasive across the six geopolitical regions of Nigeria, the current study is concerned with the political development in the southeast part of the country. Political development in the region has witnessed an overwhelming power wrangle. However, since the inception of the democratic dispensation, a significant number of women have assumed numerous political positions. For example, the southeast is among the few regions to produce a female deputy governor, and many in the state houses of assemblies, including other political posts. Thus, making the region among the women-friendly political arena. Notwithstanding, the overall women's engagement in the political terrain of the area is still below the acceptable threshold. Thus, the present paper is aimed to ascertain attitudes towards political engagement among women in southeast Nigeria.

Research question:

What are women's attitudes in southeast Nigeria towards political engagement?

Method:-

This research made use of a survey. Based on the research objective, only women participated in the study. Women within the age range of 18 to 60 years were randomly selected from different locations in Anambra, Enugu, and the Imo state of Nigeria. There were no educational, marital, location, employment, or socio-economic barriers to participation. About six hundred and twelve (612) women were approached between August and November 2021. They were urged to participate in the study to entirely understand their attitudes towards politics in the country. Five hundred sixty-seven consented to participate in the study, while others declined. Those who agreed were given the study questionnaire to assess their positive or negative attitudes towards political participation. In the end, a total of five hundred and sixteen (516) copies of the questionnaires were appropriately completed and returned. However, the remaining copies were either not returned or inappropriately filled; thus, they were discarded.

Result:-

The data gathered with the questionnaire were subjected to analysis using simple percentages, mean, and standard deviation to answer the research question. Thus, the table below shows that 78.3% of the women ($M= 1.99$, $SD =$

0.71) exhibited a positive attitude towards political engagement. On the other hand, 21.7% (M=1.01, SD =0.95) showed a negative attitude towards political engagement. Therefore, the result indicates that the majority of the respondents have positive attitudes towards political engagement.

Table 1:- Table showing the percentage, mean and standard deviation score of the attitudes towards political engagement.

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

Discussion:-

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

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

Conclusion:-

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

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