Socio-demographic predictors of gendered political participation and implications for social work practice in Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study investigated the socio-demographic predictors of gendered political participation by 64 adults selected using a multistage sampling technique. Eight focus group discussions (FGDs) of eight discussants each were used to collect data, while thematic analysis was utilized. Findings revealed that political participation is gendered and women are not equally represented. There are some socio-demographic and political predictors of women’s participation in politics and the low political participation by women has some resultant consequences on governance in Nigeria. Social workers are therefore encouraged to utilize various measures to address the consequences linked to the low participation of women in politics.

Keywords: Politics; women; gender; social work

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Despite the ratification of international conventions and protocols by states on gender equality and human rights, women have continued to be grossly underrepresented in global politics. This paper explores the factors that determine women’s participation in Nigerian politics and argues that women are underrepresented. The study is based on Focus Group Discussions held with 64 adults in a Nigerian town. Findings show that the number of women in Nigerian politics is a far cry compared to men who dominate the political and leadership arena and this has consequences for nation-building. We also found some sociodemographic and political factors as responsible for the low participation of women in Nigerian politics. To empower women for equal representation and participation in Nigerian politics, social workers have many roles to play as the issue overlaps with their professional interests.

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1. Introduction
The effective and efficient participation of women in politics is not only a matter of human rights and sustainable development but equally encourages inclusiveness (OECD, 2018a). For the achievement of sustainable development goal, peacebuilding, inclusiveness in the decision-making process, equity, and true democracy, there must be equal participation of men and women in politics and other decision-making processes. “Women in politics raise issues that others overlook, pass bills that others oppose, invest in projects others dismiss and seek to end abuses that others ignore” (National Democratic Institute, 2016, p. 1). Particularly, women who participate in politics often challenge laws and actions that are discriminatory as well as mobilize resources to meet the needs of the vulnerable population (Kasa, 2015). Despite the importance of women’s political participation and representation, in the 21st century, they have been confronted with obstacles across nations of the world that have grossly limited their participation (Kumar, 2018).

In every socio-political space across nations, women continue to be under-represented as a result of those obstacles. The United Nations (2011) agrees and notes that women continue to be overwhelmingly alienated from the political arena in every part of the world mostly due to obstacles, such as patriarchal rules, policies, behaviors and gender roles, low levels of education, poor access to health care and the adverse impact of poverty on women. Research has shown that some of the indicators hindering or promoting the political representation or participation of women vary with the level of socio-economic growth, geography, culture, and form of political structure (Alzuabi, 2016; Shvedova, 2005). This underrepresentation of women in politics is against the principles of their fundamental human rights and equally, a deviation from the core of women empowerment and gender equality (United Nations, 2019).

Interventions to improve women’s involvement in governance were developed by gender mainstreaming conferences, guidelines, and international treaties, but in the highest political rankings, they have been unable to achieve gender diversity (Morobane, 2014). Even though women make up half of the world’s population, it continues to be worrisome that they occupy only about 23% of political seats worldwide (Chalaby, 2017; Radu, 2018).

In Africa, the situation is far worse as the public commitment of African leaders has not fully protected women nor supported and encouraged them as a disadvantaged group in politics, hence women continue to stay away from the political and leadership fields (Mlambo et al., 2019). Although most African nations, according to Rop (2013), pledged to support gender equity in political representation, implementation of this commitment is yet to transform beyond paper-work. The abuse of office and the tendency to gain power through self-centered means has led the countries in Africa to disregard the needs of women. Consequently, women remain underrepresented and face obstacles that sometimes make it hard for any of them to hold political and economic power and/or assume public leadership or decision-making positions (Mlambo et al., 2019). Further, in Africa, women aspire to play an important role in shaping the path of their nations, but they have faced many obstacles that have weakened their resolve. In addition, the political environment in Africa is hostile to women and thus seen as the men’s world (Shvedova, 2005). The aftermath effects of abuses faced by women and girls during conflicts are often overlooked and under-reported in Africa, especially in terms of political participation and involvement of women in governance. Mlambo et al. (2019) asserted that the lack of political will amongst women arises from African political parties, which only think about how power can be extended through winning elections, and whatever that does not guarantee this is considered undesirable. This has jolted women’s self-confidence to engage in democratic processes.

Compared to the changing trends globally, in Nigeria, aside from voting in elections, the majority of women do not participate in political activities compared to men’s involvement, and this means
that women are greatly marginalized and underrepresented in the Nigerian political sphere, both as elected or appointed members (Atu et al., 2019; Kayode, 2020). Statistics have shown that from Nigeria’s fourth republic in 1999 to the present date, there has been no significant increment of women’s participation in political leadership, and the political areas continue to be dominated by men. For example, from 1999 to 2020, the average population of men in the Nigerian house of representatives is 94.8% with women occupying 5.2%. Almost the same average applies in the Nigerian Senate (upper house) where men’s domination from 1999 to 2020 stands at 94.3% and women at 5.7%. Kayode (2020) therefore concluded that the National average for women’s active participation in Nigerian Politics is 6.7%. Specifically, results of the 2015 elections in Nigeria shows that only 20 women (5.6%) was elected into the lower house out of 359 elective seats and again, only 7 women (6.4%) won elections to the upper house out of 109 elective seats, putting the country on the world rank of 108th position in women’s political participation Women in Parliaments: World Classification, (2019). There was no significant difference recorded in the 2019 elections where women constituted only 3.1% in the lower house and 7.3% in the upper house and even more worrisome, there has never been a female governor or president in Nigeria’s history (Nigerian Women Trust Fund [NWTF], 2019). It is therefore important to ascertain the current trend of gendered politics in Nigeria given her position of patriarchy and deeply routes cultural norms, which disadvantage women.

Interparliamentary Union (IPU; 2020) reported that the national average of women’s participation in politics in Nigeria is far below the global average of 24.9%, the Sub-Saharan average of 24.3%, and the West African average of 15%. Thus, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2020) in its 2020 Human Development Report on gender inequality asserted that the Nigerian national average for women’s active participation in politics (6.7%) is a low index of human development. To correct this marginalization and underrepresentation would therefore mean that the percentage of women’s participation in politics must increase or equal that of men. To this end, women’s active participation in decision-making roles will help to promote the overall standard of governance in terms of responsiveness and accountability, reducing corruption and protection of the rights of the disadvantaged population of society (OECD, 2008). Given that women constitute at least half of the world’s population, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is unlikely without their full and active participation.

The position of social work practice in this regard is hinged on its primary mission, which is aimed at promoting social justice and democratic tenets, eradication of inequality and marginalization as well as empowerment and liberation to enhance the wellbeing of all, with a special focus on the vulnerable, oppressed, and marginalized population (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). With particular reference to the marginalization of women in political representation and its resultant effects on governance, social work becomes a profession capable of restoring balance and maintaining homeostasis (Theater, 2010). In this regard, social workers in an African setting concerning Igbo communities are expected to provide support for women through education and economic empowerment so they can participate and compete favorably in national and local politics (National Association of Social Workers, 2017; Okoye, 2013b). Furthermore, despite the importance of women’s participation in politics, their continuous underrepresentation in Nigeria is worrisome and evident in areas of the curriculum for both social workers and the normative schools where such is hardly discussed. The shortage of well-trained social workers in this field as well as the absence of staunch legislations and Acts of Parliament to give impetus to its practice in Nigeria has not helped (Okoye, 2013a). Despite such setbacks, it is expected that available trained social workers should assist in preventing and resolving existing social problems (Merriman & Harding, 2010) such as achieving equitable gender distribution in Nigerian politics. It is for this reason that the results of this study remain key to promoting the practice of social work in Nigeria, with specific regard to raising awareness of the under-representation of women in politics and its consequent implications.
This study is anchored by the feminist theory and empowerment theory. The feminist theory holds that women’s lower status is due to societal inequality, which is shaped by political, economic, and social power relations, and that women should have equal access to all forms of power (Turner & Maschi, 2014). Feminist theory focuses on gender politics, power relations, and sexuality to analyze gender inequalities. While feminist philosophy critiques these social and political ties, it also emphasizes the advancement of women’s rights and interests (Orisadare, 2019). Feminists hold the belief that societies prioritize men’s viewpoints and that women are treated unfairly within those communities (Gamble, 2001). Efforts to alter this include combating gender stereotypes and ensuring that women have similar educational, professional, and interpersonal opportunities and outcomes as men. Women’s rights, including the freedom to vote, hold public office, work, earn equal pay, own property, obtain an education, make contracts, have equal rights within marriage, and take maternity leave, have been championed by feminist movements. Save to advancing women’s rights and interests, the empowerment theory becomes important to understand how empowering women would help ensure gender equality. Feminist ideology, like empowerment, helps women recognize how they have been oppressed and dominated, and it frequently encourages them to participate in efforts to bring about greater societal change. The use of intervention approaches to lead people toward a sense of control is central to the empowerment paradigm of social work. For example, people may feel powerless for a variety of reasons, but empowerment theory focuses on how oppression plays a role in this. The empowerment theory focuses on giving marginalized individuals the personal, interpersonal, and political power they need to better their circumstances on an individual, group, and community level. In addition, the model aims to challenge systems that restrict or obstruct people from getting their basic needs addressed. According to Razmi et al. (2018) one of the ways to ensure full empowerment of women is to ensure an equal number of political seats and participation hence, the social, political, and economic barriers discussed as barriers in feminist theory should be eradicated. Other studies have combined the feminist theory and the empowerment theory to understand women’s participation in politics (Madunagu, 2008; Orisadare, 2019).

Globally, women’s participation in politics is widely researched and some form of marginalization is recorded (Alzuabi, 2016; Cassese & Holman, 2016; Kasa, 2015). Relatively few studies have been done in Nigeria in the area of gendered political participation (Atu et al., 2019 & Kayode, 2020) and were of the view that the remedy to this issue falls within the domain of law and political sciences. However, no study was found to have focused on the predicting factors that determine participation, especially in Enugu State Nigeria. It is in this vein that the present study seeks to address the gaps in other studies, as it aims to explore the socio-demographic predictors of gendered political participation in Enugu State, Nigeria. Finally, away from the political and legal perspectives as is the case with previous studies, this study’s distinction is in the introduction of the social work profession as a principal actor within the domains of gendered politics, given their professional ideals of social change, social justice, equality, and human rights.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Study area

The study specifically focused on Nsukka town in Enugu State, Nigeria. Nsukka is in the South Eastern geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The study area is equally home to the University of Nigeria’s main campus and therefore is regarded as a cosmopolitan town because of its characteristics (Ezech & Ugwu, 2010). Nsukka has 309,633 populations with 149,241 males and 160,392 females (National Population Commission, 2006). Nsukka town is predominantly a Christian area with a mix of other religions, such as Islam and African Traditional Religion.

2.2. Sampling procedure

The qualitative research design was adopted for this study. This design allows for an in-depth exploration of participants’ views on the subject of research (Bryman, 2016; Ritchie et al., 2014). The qualitative research design was chosen against quantitative design because the aim of this
work is not for generalization but to seek in-depth views (Mason, 2002; Silverman, 2005) on the predictors of gendered political participation in Nigeria. The study was carried out between May and July 2019, a few months after the presidential and gubernatorial elections in Nigeria. The sample size for the study was 64 adults with equal distribution of younger and older categories. We estimated that a sample size of 64 adults, which is within the recommended sample size for qualitative description study design, will lead to data sufficiency (Sandelowski, 2000). Younger adults were classified to be between the ages of 18 and 59, whereas older adults were classified to be between the ages of 60 and above. The Nigerian policy which considers 18 years as the onset of adult age and 60 years as the retirement age for civil servants inspired this division. The researchers were age- and gender-sensitive to pick participants for the focus group discussion (FGD). The reason behind the sensitivities of age and gender is to guarantee that participants feel relaxed communicating without any need to feel out of place. The study, therefore, utilized eight FGDs containing four all-male groups and four all-female groups for the qualitative survey. Four older adult male groups and four younger male groups were formed to ensure equal distribution across gender and age. Again, from the four adult male groups, two younger male groups and two older male groups were formed and the same process was repeated for females.

For the recruitment of study participants, the researchers adopted multistage sampling, which involves stratified sampling, simple random and purposive sampling techniques. The study area (Nsukka Town) was initially stratified into two (The off-campus community and the campus community). The off-campus community comprises those who live outside the university campus while the campus community comprises of those who live within the university campus, mostly students and staff of the university. We adopted a simple random technique (balloting) to select specific streets within the off-campus and campus communities. Lastly, we adopted the purposive sampling technique to directly choose those who indicated interest to participate in the study and also met the eligibility criteria [age and sex] for the study (Bryman, 2016). We opted for Focus Group Discussions in our inquiry because it is frequently used as a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of social issues, especially from a purposely selected group of individuals with similar characteristics, such as gender and age (Ochieng et al., 2018).

The participants were invited for the FGDs at specific locations. For the period of the research, the FGDs took place mostly on weekends [Saturdays & Sundays] and evenings of weekdays, when participants had less engagement. Eight participants made up each FGD [four selected from the off-campus and four from the campus communities]. For standardization, the researchers all had a uniform FGD guide and each of them moderated the FGD sessions alongside a research assistant who took notes in case the recording device develops technical issues. FGDs were conducted in English, Nigerian Pidgin, and Igbo languages, depending on the proficiency of the participants in the language. Only Six FGDs were conducted in English while Igbo and Nigerian pidgin were utilized, respectively, in conducting the other two FGD. Before commencing the Focus group discussions, we informed the participants of the aim of the study, the benefits and risks involved, and their rights to withdraw from the study at any time. We also assured participants confidentiality and anonymity and also sought their consent for participation and recording. Participants verbally consented to participate in the study and for their responses to be audio-recorded (British Society of Gerontology, 2012; Wiles et al., 2008). The Ethical Review Board of the primary authors’ institution granted permission to conduct this study.

2.3. Data analysis
The audio-taped responses were later transcribed into English. The researchers read through the transcripts and formed themes they used for the study analysis in line with the criteria of thematic analysis (Bryman, 2016). Two authors independently transcribed verbatim, the Six FGD interviews conducted in English while another two authors who are both fluent in both English, Igbo, and Nigerian pidgin independently translated and transcribed the two FGDs conducted in Igbo and Nigerian pidgin. To ensure data transcription to English was accurate, the primary
author who is also fluent in both English Igbo and Nigerian pidgin did a final cross-check of the transcribed data. We arranged a meeting with two of the participants in the FGDs conducted in Igbo and Nigerian Pidgin for validation of the transcribed data to ensure trustworthiness. Thematic analysis was utilized in coding the transcribed data. Three coders independently read and re-read transcripts of one FGD and identified early themes and sub-themes (see, Table 1 for themes and sub-themes). While coding, the three coders noted their observations and reflections as they read the transcript and they organized team meetings to discuss their findings and resolve areas of disagreement. The early themes and subthemes identified were used to analyze other transcripts. The coders were also quick to capture emerging themes. The themes established were coined from the research questions and they helped in the formulation of the FGD guide. The research questions were as follows: [a] What views of participants on gendered political participation? [b] What are the socio-demographic predictors of gendered political participation in Nigeria? [c] What are the problems arising from gendered political participation? (d) What are the implications of the findings to social work practice in Nigeria? Narratives from the discussions were quoted word for word to illustrate the participants’ specific reactions and feelings and to support themes. All identifying information was blinded to maintain the anonymity of participants. We did Peer-member checking where all authors examined the generated themes and sub-themes and provided feedback (Sandelowski, 2000). The NVivo© Software was utilized to manage data throughout the study.

3. Results
Data presents the realities of socio-demographic predictors of gendered political participation in Nigeria with a particular focus on Nsukka town. The first theme surveyed the participant’s demographic profile. The focus of the second theme was to explore the views of participants on gendered politics and women’s participation in Nigerian politics. The third theme was to examine the views of the participants on the socio-demographic predictors of gendered political participation. Lastly, a theme presented the participants’ views on the problems occasioned by gendered politics in Nigeria. In general, their perception of these themes was primarily informed by events they had encountered, seen, or learned about.

3.1. Demographic characteristics of participants
Men and women who participated in this study were in the age range of 20–75 and were grouped into younger and older categories due to age could exert influence on the research subject. At least 75% of the participants had attained a tertiary level of education and are expected to be knowledgeable about the gendered politics or be easily educated on them by way of a reminder. The majority of the participants were married, and it was observed that marriage could be a factor influencing gendered politics. The majority of the participants were Christians. It was equally observed that gendered politics have a religious inclination attached to them.

| Themes                                      | Sub-theme                                      |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Views on gendered politics and women participation in Nigerian politics | • Fewer women in Nigerian politics and leadership |
| Predictors of gendered political participation in Nigeria | • Socio-demographic predictors of gendered political participation in Nigeria  
|                                                                 | • Political predictors                         |
| Effects of low participation and representation of women in politics | • Human rights issues and civil responsibility infringement  
|                                                                 | • Lack of accountability, transparency, and responsiveness in government |
3.2. Views on gendered politics and women's participation in Nigerian politics

3.2.1. Fewer women in Nigerian politics and leadership

Several participants were of the view that politics is gendered in most countries of the world and even worse in Nigeria. They revealed that the political arena is dominated by men and the number of women in politics, leadership, and/or decision-making areas are very few compared to what should be the standard. The participants also revealed that at best the leadership or decision-making position exclusively reserved for women is the role of deputy and even more worrisome, the male gender is beginning to take over that role. Three participants confirmed gendered political participation around the world and specifically in Nigeria.

… who doesn't know that politics is seen as a man’s game and a male-dominated area? How many countries do we have in the world and what is the gender ratio among the world leaders? … Well, women around the world are indeed beginning to get more political seats compared to the past, but the numbers continue to be insignificant, to say the least … Nigeria for example, the seat of the president has always been dominated by men and no single woman has ever come close to winning a presidential or gubernatorial election since our independence and democracy even. At best, you find very few women as senators and House of Representatives compared to their male counterparts (Female, 63 years old).

Women hardly try to participate or contest elections because they know that they will not win. Instead, the best alternative most of them go for is to become deputy or vice or even wait to be appointed into a leadership position. For the majority of others, they don’t like to participate in anything concerning politics, voting inclusive. The typical rural woman only goes out for political rallies or polling centers with the hope to get some shared monies or resources from the politicians (Male, 29 years old).

It is a man’s world and politics is basically for men, competing with them or voting in elections does not bear any fruit. Last year in Nigeria, a very prominent Nigerian woman declared interest in the presidential seat. We thought it was going to be a new dawn, we rallied and gave her campaign great support but close to the elections, she withdrew her candidature to our disappointment. We however weren’t surprised because even in her high status and profile, she probably knew that her gender would disadvantage her quest for the presidency. This made most women give up even more on politics and other leadership positions struggle (Female, 60 years old).

3.3. Predictors of gendered political participation in Nigeria

Under this theme, data was presented on the predictors of gendered political participation, and reasons women do not participate fully and/or are underrepresented in Nigerian politics. Participants shared different concerns, which have been categorized in sub-themes of socio-demographic predictors and political predictors:

3.3.1. Socio-demographic predictors of gendered political participation in Nigeria

Data show that there are varied socio-demographic indicators of gendered politics in Nigeria that in no small way contribute to the uneven participation and representation of women in politics. Predictors such as age, religion, education, economic status/employment, and marriage were pronounced strongly by the participants as predictors of women's participation and or representation in politics.

3.3.1.1. Education. Some participants were of the view that a woman's level of education can significantly predict her level of involvement in politics and decision-making positions in Nigeria. They believed that politics require good public speaking skills and public speaking comes with intelligence. Therefore, lacking education and consequently, the skill of public speaking has influenced people, especially women to stay away from politics. A 33-year-old woman has this to say,
Politics and leadership positions bring one face to face with the whole world and good communication skill is very vital for anyone holding political offices and other leadership post. Most women and men even who are less educated think very low of their ability to address the public and this contributes to the reasons why most women hardly engage in politics. (Female, 33 years old).

Another participant discussed education as a predictor from the perspective of decision-making and articulation and therefore, uneducated persons especially the female gender shy away from politics for fear of public ridicule and poor decision-making abilities. He said,

Holding a political or leadership position involves decision-making on behalf of the people you serve or represent. Therefore, women who are not educated cannot make an informed decision and they do not venture into occupying such seats for fear of ridicule. Besides, there is a set educational standard for occupying any political or leadership position in Nigeria. This has sidelined many women especially the rural poor who are without any formal education or with only primary education (Male, 64 years old).

Further, some participants feel that education does affect the turnout of voters and largely predicts women’s participation as voters. They believed that education enlightens the local people on the need to exercise their franchise and also equips them with the knowledge of identifying and voting credible candidates who will serve their interests. Clarifying this, a 59 year old female participant said,

People who are not educated often fail to understand the importance of voting in elections. Some do not vote at all because they are undecided on who to vote for as they cannot judge candidates for elections … Truly, ignorance is indeed a problem (Female, 59 years old).

3.3.1.2. Religion. Participants raised concerns on religion as a predictor of gendered political participation in Nigeria. The result from data shows that Christian women are more likely to be involved in political participation than women of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Islamic religion. A Christian participant said,

All religion emphasizes gender roles and to some extent are pointers to how much women should participate in social functions, politics inclusive. For example, most religion such as Christianity, Islamic religion, and ATR emphasizes the supportive roles of women to their husbands and admonish them to seek consent from their husbands as they do not own themselves but belong to their husbands. This is part of the reasons most women who may have an eye for politics could not participate because they need consent from their husbands to do so (Female, 65 years old).

Another participant was of the view that even though all religion emphasizes women’s submission and male dominance, some religion is more liberal than others. This was echoed in the words of a participant thus: … “Christian women participate more in politics and leadership compared to Islamic women and their compeers in ATR. This may be because ATR and Islam are more conservative and they allow one man—many wife who further creates domination and disregards” (Male, 32 years old).

3.3.1.3. Economic status. Poverty and employment grouped as economic status are among the predictors of women’s participation in politics in Nigeria as discussed by participants. Participants believe that political campaigns in Nigeria are conducted with lots of money and elections are equally won with money. Therefore, women who are economically disadvantaged in Nigeria are at greater risk to lose interest in politics for the lack of funds.

We sampled quotes of participants below capturing views and lived experience.

Most women who succeed in politics are usually sponsored by their husbands or god-fathers who in turn request to have sex with them for such help. Politics is a game of money and
only the rich, high, and mighty play the game of politics. Take, for instance, the candidature form for primary elections in Nigeria costs millions, where do you expect most people especially women to get such monies from given that the majority are grossly unemployed or underemployed. This issue of money and politics has made many politically minded women lose interest … (Male, 27 years old).

I was a strong voice in my local community when it comes to politics. I was sure to get almost 100 percent vote if I was made the flag bearer of my party for the 2007 and 2011 elections. However, after many attempts at politics, I got fed up with the political party’s arrangement where the god-fathers or the party chieftains expected me to bribe them with some millions before they make me the party flag bearer for the elections … Where do they expect me to get all of such money from? … because I was unable to meet their financial demands, my opponent who had fewer chances of winning the election was issued the party ticket because He had money … . Truth is if you want to win elections in Nigeria or gain political and leadership appointments, just focus first on acquiring wealth … (Female, 69 years old).

3.3.1.4. Marital status. Data shows that the marital status of women serves as a predictor of the level of their participation in politics or political affairs. For most women in Nigerian families, specifically, the Igbo communities where patriarchy and male dominance are cultural, the extent of women’s participation in politics vastly depends on the approval of the husband. Participants also revealed that the case is even worse as women are sometimes not free to exercise their franchise but are made to vote in most cases for either of the two major political parties in Nigeria [All Progressive Congress and Peoples Democratic Party] where their husband’s interest lies. This shows that the political behavior of married women in the study area is greatly influenced by their spouse’s interest and opinion. Confirming this is the narrative of two participants who said:

… I and my husband are one and to ensure consistent peace in the family, it is only good we both share the same interest in most if not all areas of life. As a voter, I cannot vote for PDP when my husband’s interest lies in APC” (Female, 29 years old).

Before I got married, I was a strong supporter of APC and I had big dreams to become a local government chairman. Things were working in my favor but along the line of political tussle, I met my husband who happened to be a supporter of the opposition party PDP. … Fast forward to this day, my political commitment has waned off compared to when I was single. This is because my husband feels I need to concentrate more on taking care of our children other than going to political rallies as a mother with home responsibilities. Well, I love him so I gradually obeyed. It is even funny how I have come to be a firm supporter of his party PDP without even noticing it (Female, 60 years old).

Another female participant aged 20 has this to say, “My husband gets our daily bread [finances] through his affiliation with APC. Do you expect me not to support APC?” A male participant aged 62 concluded thus: “Due to violence and the lack of transparency in our elections, I do not vote in elections and I expect my whole family to remain indoors too, my wife understands and she obeys”.

3.3.2. Political predictors
Data shows some political predictors of gendered political participation in Nigeria including party affiliation and political godfather factor.

3.3.2.1. Party affiliation. Political party affiliation could significantly influence the level of women’s participation in politics. Data shows that those who are partisan are more likely to engage in a political rally, vote or be voted for in elections, and even get appointed into some political, leadership, and executive positions. The same cannot be said of those who are not card-carrying members of a political party. A male participant buttressed this view thus:

Women who engage in politics more are those who are registered members of a political party. They do not only vote but take it as a responsibility to mobilize others to vote. Because
they are very close to the politicians and possibly enjoy more benefits as card-carrying members, they are always at the forefront during elections, mobilizing other women and youth . . . . As compensation, such women are usually appointed into some leadership positions by the political party or the winning candidate (Male, 67 years).

I am not in any political party and I do not enjoy the benefits to their members. Party chieftains or candidates are always sharing foodstuffs and money to their party faithful that is why you see most of their women very active in politics partly because of the gains (Female, 22 years old).

A party chieftain queried thus: “you don’t expect us to appoint women who are not in our party to occupy sensitive vacant political positions. If you are not in a political party, how would you understand how we operate to warrant being appointed into leadership positions?” (Male, 71 years old).

3.3.2.2. Political godfatherism. Our data revealed that part of the predictors to women’s political participation and/or representation is having a godfather in Nigerian politics. This cut across gender but women are often disadvantaged here as most political chieftains or godfathers are men and they make political and party laws to favor other men first. Participants were of the view that only women with godfathers venture into politics for want of favor, recommendations, and financial support, and they in turn compensate the male godfathers with sex. In the direct words of two participants, they said,

Patriarchy in our society has disadvantaged us already, so if I do not have someone powerful who is willing to support me politically, I have no business pursuing a political ambition. You must be favored by party leaders or other prominent persons if you must succeed in politics in Nigeria. This applies to both male and female political aspirants but the situation is even worse among women (Female, 34 years old).

. . . asking those old men for political help always come with a sacrifice. They always use this local slang ‘if you scratch my back, I will scratch your back’ meaning you must have sex with them before they give you the help you need. Women who could not comply with such demands and do not have a political backup, do not border vying for political representation (Female, 30 years old).

3.4. Effects of low participation and representation of women in politics
Participants raised concerns on the problems and effects arising from low participation and representation of women in governance. Issues raised have human rights implications and human welfare concerns.

3.4.1. Human right issues and civil responsibility infringement
Data revealed that the adequate representation and participation of women in politics is their fundamental human rights and their participation in political affairs, such as voting, is their civil responsibility. Participants feel that since women are not well represented in Nigerian leadership and political areas, it is an infringement on their fundamental human rights. For those who for different reasons are not participating in political activities, such as voting, it is equally an infringement on their civil responsibility. Narrative of human rights issue was captured by a 53-year-old man who said:

It is the right of women to have equal representation with men in politics and other fields of life . . . . This was captured in the Fundamental human right, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) among other laws and edicts promoting inclusiveness and equity amongst humans, gender irrespective. Since this is yet to be fully achieved across nations of the world and more worrisome in Nigerian states, it, therefore, becomes abuse or a deviation from the stipulations of human rights, CEDAW, and others. This is undermining the right of association and freedom of expression which every human should have.
The other participant said: “participating in public life is empowering and one of the civil duties of every law-abiding citizen is to vote in elections. Some women in Nigeria have not been fulfilling this responsibility for reasons they may have justification for. It, however, does not take away the fact that they are disobeying the laws of the land by not voting or participating in public life, thereby undermining democracy (Female, 31 years old).

3.4.2. Lack of accountability, transparency, and responsiveness in government
Participants believed that a government without gender balance will continue to face issues, hence the need to incorporate women fully into the political and public life so they too could contribute their quota and expertise for a sustainable and responsive government. Some of the participants have these to say:

If we have a system that encourages equal gender participation in politics, our country will be a better place to live in because perspectives and approaches to issues will be richer. While the men think structures, the women will be thinking welfare. It is the nature of women to think about welfare first …. it is however unfortunate that this is lacking as a result of poor female representation and participation (Female, 21 years old).

Women in politics are more open and closer to the people than the men. Women are equally more empathetic and raise issues that have been ignored especially those that concern women. This is because they understand the plight of other women more and they are the best advocates to explain in parliament what women and girls go through as well as ensure policy formulations and implementation for their benefit … Unlike most of our male politicians who are very greedy, women are more accountable and transparent as their focus is primarily to make a difference in the lives of those they serve. I can tell you that the average Nigerian have lost faith in the government and believes that transparency and accountability are far from this Buhari’s government (Male, 64 years old).

… Most female politicians are more focused on the needs of vulnerable communities. For example, the offices of the First lady of Nigeria is more concerned with the provision of materials for the disadvantaged communities as well as empowering women and children … look at Enugu State for instance, where a woman is the deputy governor, you see some level of governmental responsiveness (Male, 22 years old).

3.5. Discussion
This study investigated the socio-demographic predictors of gendered political participation among younger and older adult residents in Nsukka town, Enugu State, Nigeria. Findings show that the majority of the participants reported gendered political participation and representation. They also had varied views as regards the predictors of women’s participation in politics classified as socio-demographic predictors [Education, religion, economic status, marriage] and political predictors [party affiliation and god-fatherism]. Some agreed to the socio-demographic predictors without disputing the influence of the political predictors and vice versa political predictors. However, socio-demographic predictors such as education and economic status ranked higher in their reports. The participant further raised concerns on the problems of low participation and representation of women in politics. Emphasis was placed on human rights and civil responsibility infringement as well as the absence of responsiveness in government as major problems gendered politics births. Given the underlined circumstances of the study, findings show that this area is important for social workers whose function includes but is not limited to enhancing human wellbeing, empowerment, promoting inclusiveness and egalitarianism, and protecting the interests of a marginalized population.

Specifically, the majority of the participants were of the view that in Nigeria, just like in most of the world, the proportion of women who participate or are represented in politics is grossly insignificant, and as such gendered politics exist across nations but are far worse in Nigeria. The analysis further revealed that male dominance in political representation continues to be on the
increase and even the deputy role initially reserved for women is now being occupied by men. This finding is consistent with previous observations (Atu et al., 2019; Dim, 2019; Kumar, 2018; United Nations, 2011) and also captured by the feminist theory that women are marginalized and under-represented (Orisadare, 2019; Turner & Maschi, 2014). Second, the analysis confirms that there are predictors to gendered politics experienced and they were grouped into two distinct categories. In the socio-demographic category, predictors, such as education, religion, employment/poverty, and marriage, were found. The overall importance of education was revealed when participants averred that educational attainment determines women’s political participation or representation. That is, those who are more educated are positively associated with political participation than those who are less educated or not educated at all. Other studies (Karl, 2001; Kasa, 2015) and theories, such as the empowerment theory corroborate this finding, especially as level of education shows a strong prediction to women’s political and leadership participation. Religion was seen as a predictor of women’s participation in politics as it has to a large extent influenced negatively the participation of women in politics. Confirming this result is the study of Cassesse and Holman (2016) when they found that religion is, generally, a significant predictor of women’s participation and/or representation in politics. This could be because almost all religion emphasizes male dominance and female duty to submit to their husbands. However, in comparison, our study found that Christian women are more likely to participate in politics than their compatriots in African Traditional Religion and Islamic religion. This is could be attributed to the liberal stance of the Christian religion compared to Islam and ATR, which are more conservative. In the same section, employment and poverty were found to be among the socio-demographic predictors of low women’s participation in politics.

The result shows that most women are economically disadvantaged whereas politics requires funding and this paradox have left many female political aspirants to cut their dreams short. This finding is in agreement with Dim (2019) and Kasa (2015) when they reported employment or economic status as an indicator of political participation. However, in slight contrast, Dim (2019) found that among those employed or economically engaged, only self-employment is a significant predictor of political participation and this is because “self-employed women are more confident, more assertive, and wealthier, and have a greater sense of self-efficacy than women employed in the private and public sectors” (pp. 101). Lastly, results showed that marriage is another predictor of the level of women’s participation in politics. Our analysis revealed that the political behavior of married women is greatly influenced by their spouse unlike when they were single. It was confirmed that married women would need to get some form of permission from their husbands before venturing into politics. Studies (Mlambo et al., 2019) reported the same on the influence of marriage on women’s political behavior.

In the political predictor’s category, this study revealed that party affiliation is a significant predictor of political participation, especially for women. Those who are partisan are more associated with political rallies, voting and are more likely to be elected into leadership positions compared to those who are not partisan. The women who have a strong affiliation with political parties are more likely to participate in politics and/or chosen for political representation than those who have no affiliation with any political party. A previous observation (Kittilson, 2016) agrees with our findings. However, some findings (Leigh, n.d. & Karl, 2001) found otherwise by reporting that party affiliation is an insignificant predictor of political participation. This variation in findings could be attributed to settings [Time and geographical location of studies]. In the last section, our analysis confirmed the problems associated with gendered politics. Human rights breaches and civil duty infringement as well as an irresponsible and unaccountable government, are tops of the problems in a gendered political environment. Other studies are consistent with our findings (Dim, 2019; Mlambo et al., 2019).

Results of this study supported the assertions of the feminist theory that women are marginalized and underrepresented in politics in Nigeria as a result of political, economic, and social factors (Turner & Maschi, 2014) hence needs economic, social, political, and religious
empowerment to be fully liberated to have equal opportunities like men (Razmi et al., 2018). It is therefore the position for social workers to bring in sensitization programs that will enlighten the local people on the gains of having more women to participate in politics. Such sensitization programs alongside concerted efforts to mitigate barriers will birth greater involvement or fair representation of women in politics. These proactive interventions are compatible with social workers’ preventive approaches toward incidents that endanger human well-being (Ajibo, 2020; Iwuagwu & Kalu, 2021; Iyiani et al., 2020; Ngwu et al., 2020; Okafor et al., 2020; Okah et al., 2017). This call is not out of position because narratives from the current study showed that many barriers as negative predictors have bedeviled women’s participation and apt representation in Nigerian politics. Thus, it is up to the social work profession in Nigeria to pay close attention to this field of research interest. The achievement of a fair political representation of gender is focused on preventative and curative steps. Social workers are required to lobby and campaign for policies from a preventive position that resist gendered political activities that are encouraged by the existing patriarchal culture in Nigeria as evident in our findings. This will protect the right of women, promote true democracy as well as encourage them to fulfill their civic responsibilities like exercising their franchise during elections.

The importance of the empowerment theory cannot be overemphasized in a study of this nature. This is because it emphasizes empowering women, giving them a voice, and promoting gender equality. It also encourages women’s participation in political and social change in their communities. Human empowerment is one of the loci of the social work profession (National Association of Social Workers, 2017; Okoye, 2013b), and given that education is a predict (empowerment) in women’s political participation as revealed in this study, it is therefore incumbent on social workers to ensure that women have access to education that should make them aware of their rights and provide them with the knowledge and competencies they need to empower their participation and excel in leadership roles. This form of empowerment would enable women to emerge from their marginalized role of playing second fiddle and thus hold positions of political leadership and decision-making that will not only help them resolve issues that are averse to women’s growth but also help them make a significant contribution to society. Also, with regards to the absence of awareness on the effects of gendered political participation in Nigeria, Social workers should make efforts to lobby for the inclusion of the subject into the civic education curriculum of secondary schools and also into the social work education curriculum in tertiary institutions. On this basis, Okoye (2013a) and Onalu et al. (2020) affirmed that Nigeria’s social work education and training programs are still to modify their curricula to integrate contemporary social issues, one of which is the issue of gendered political representation and participation in Nigeria. This addition to the curricula would go a long way towards cultivating not only a knowledgeable population but also an effective workforce to deal with the complexities of gendered politics.

4. Conclusion
Findings from this study should be understood bearing in mind that some sociodemographic factors influence women’s attitudes towards politics, thus political participation is gendered or unequal by gender. The study acknowledges that some socio-demographic factors [level of education, religion, economic status/employment, and marital status], as well as political factors [party affiliation and god-fatherism], are predictors and in one way or another, could have influenced the participant’s opinion on the research topic. Away from the perspective of laws and politics, social workers have roles to play in the issue of women and political representation and are therefore encouraged to utilize various measures to address the consequences linked to the low participation of women in politics. The feminist theory and empowerment theory showed to be important perspectives to ameliorating the low participation of women in politics and leadership, thus we recommend a similar subject to be anchored by these theories.
5. Study’s strength and limitation

Even though our study provides in-depth information on the subject of research, we must report some limitations. Although we collected data from a large number of persons, we cannot generalize our findings because we conducted the study in a single local government area. It is therefore proposed that similar studies should be carried out to generate quality inferences in neighboring local government areas for credible globalization. We did not conduct participant member checking, which would have increased the study’s trustworthiness. However, we believe that peer-member checking increased the study’s rigor. Despite these limitations, the findings of the present study should be of interest to students, scholars, and professionals of social work, law, and political science, as well as policymakers in Nigeria, Africa, and other parts of the world where women continue to be under-represented.

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