



Psycho-Demographic Factors Influencing Social and Political Activism in Nigeria¹

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Abstract:

Prior studies on social and political activism have neglected people's demographic and psychosocial factors, particularly in Nigeria. Thus, an inquiry is germane. This study used the world value data wave 7 collected between 2015-2020 for Nigeria, to assess the factors that determined participation in socio-political activism. The data were subjected to t-test, correlation, and regression analysis. A positive statistically significant correlation existed among gender, age, social class, and employment status, and interest in politics and participation in political activism, while negative correlation was found among educational level, geo-political region, and participation in political activism. A significant difference was found in participation and political activism based on social class, educational level, age, income, place, and marital status. No difference was found based on gender. Multiple regression analysis showed that the greatest potent set of predictors of participation in political activism are interest, gender, the highest level of education and marital status. The findings have germane implications for the realization of the Sustainable Development Goal 5.

Keywords:

Gender; interest; politics; political participation; political actions.

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Introduction

The Nigerian nation has, over the years, witnessed a swell in social and political activism across its six- geopolitical regions, with the major ones happening in cities like Lagos, Port Harcourt, Ibadan, Enugu, Kaduna, and Kano. This could be confirmed with the heightened interest among social scientists in political activism in the past two decades, perhaps due to changes in patterns of civic engagement in the political space across the world, Nigeria inclusive. In societies, and across time, there has been some semblance of activism. Some forms of activism include various mass protests, civil disobedience, rallies held across America, Europe, Asia, and Africa for social and political change.

With a population of over 200 million people, it is impossible for every citizen to make his or her voice heard against the government, especially when the citizens are unhappy or dissatisfied about any government policy. Activists are known to always want to look for creative ways to stand up and demand change. To this end, some protests are vast, with thousands joining together on the streets of the State capital or cities as observed in the #EndSARS protest of 2020, and recently, the nationwide youth hunger protest, tagged #EndBadGovernance in Nigeria, the anti-racism protest in the UK and demonstration against proposed new taxes in Kenya. Mayer (2024) submits that radicalism is pronounced in Nigeria as activists constantly mobilise against policies that are anti-masses. While we have had vocal personalities like Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Baba Aye, Gani Fawehinmi, Femi Aborishade and the likes, other activists are quieter in their modus operandi - all that they do is to share their posts online to spread awareness. This reflects the fact that not everyone can participate equally. Some are too afraid to speak out after seeing what happened to those who have been too vocal in the past. It is therefore germane to probe into those demographic and psychological factors that have contributed to the increasing interest and rise as well as the subterranean involvement of some people in social and political activism.

Shaw (2012) and Ricketts (2012) provided guidelines for grassroots activism which included the importance of building grassroots movement, setting clear goals and objectives, effective communication and messaging strategies and the importance of selfcare and prevention of burnout. Nygard et al. (2015) postulate that activism is a deliberate action taken by an individual or individuals to facilitate socio-political change. Activism, therefore, is an action taken on behalf of a cause, that is, an action that goes beyond conventional or routine means. The action takes different forms - it could be organized rallies, public meetings, door-to-door canvassing, mass media (print or electronic) or fasting. It refers to deliberate action to bring about change in social, political, economic, or environmental spheres of society that are hitherto not pleasing. The concept 'social activism' is a tool for social movements. It is a catalyst for social change. Social activism is about actions and attitudes to challenge, persuade and call for change in social life, status, power, and resources distribution of society (Atkinson, 2017; Dragonas, and Vassiliou, 2017; Kutlaca et al., 2020).



As for the concept of political activism, different meanings of the term have arisen. Drozd (2015) avers that activism refers to the various voluntary activities engaged in by citizens, aimed at influencing decisions of the political system. Norris (2009), for instance, describes political activism as the ways in which people engage, the mechanisms that lead them to do so, and the implications of these actions. From Norris' definition of political activism, it literally means acts such as rallies, street marches, sit-in or sit-at-home, hunger strikes, petition signing, boycotts, nonviolent demonstrations, strikes, and other movements to call for correction of government policies by individuals or groups of people.

A review of existing literature shows various factors and socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, and age affecting people's participatory behaviours (Cheeseman and Dodsworth, 2019; Guillemot, and Price, 2017; OECD, 2018). Several studies conducted have reported different findings on social and political activism across age groups, gender, ethnicity, and occupation activists (Nolas, et al., 2017). Age has been identified as an important factor in political activism. This could be seen from two perspectives, that is, political practice and generation-specific engagements. While young people participate in political activities such as voting and membership of political parties, they however, are likely to engage in protests than older members of the society. The young ones born in the Internet age are more visible and present in the cyber sphere.

Aside socio-demographics, scholars have identified some psychosocial factors that could influence human behaviour and specifically activism. These factors include attitude, interest in politics, political efficacy, socialisation process, trust in institutions, civic responsibility, and democratic values (Petrović, and Stanojević, 2020). What this implies is that political activism only attracts people who have the means needed and not those who are the least satisfied and objectively the most vulnerable. This study has identified interest as a psychological variable that may influence socio-political activism.

Interest in politics, an innate disposition, may be difficult to describe. Psychologists and other scientists who have attempted to research on interest have described it from varying viewpoints, depending on their schools of thought. Interest could be described as an idiosyncratic attitude that stimulates an individual to execute a certain task. It offers fun and pleasure and leads to inquisitiveness about the item of interest, excitement to be attached to the object, intensity of commitment to face problems when engaged in the mission of one's interest (Hidi and Renninger, 2019a, b). Thus, interest in politics can then be viewed as an attachment to decisional latitude in the public space. Prior studies have identified political interest and political efficacy as predictors of political participation.

In a four-continents-cross-countries study, Vecchione et al. (2015) observed that political activism relates to openness to change values. It positively relates to self-transcendence and autonomy of thought. It, however, relates negatively to conformity

and personal security. In Palestine, Spellings et al. (2012) tested the influence of family psychosocial and socio-economic characteristics as predictors of political activism of Palestinian 9th graders' political activism. Youth activism is predictable by parental activism which was the strongest predictor. Socioeconomic and religiosity were not potent enough in understanding activism.

Petrović, and Stanojević (2020) found that Serbians prefer novel and unconventional forms of political activism (such as petition-signing) to older systems of political participation. The study indicated that Serbians' participation in political activism increased as resources, economic and education. It was also found that as citizens get older, they tend to prefer the traditional forms of political participation, while the younger generation preferred unconventional forms. Using the Malaysia Wave 6 (2010–2014) data of the World Values Surveys (WVS), Norhafiza and Grasso (2020) found that demographic variables such as the levels of gender, ethnic group, and education are linked generational participation (between the old and the young) in political activism.

Social and political activism have persisted over time, despite increased attempts at greater and equitable distribution of resources of the state and involvement in political activities. The well-known political reality is that women have lower political representation than men (Akpanika, 2019; Dim and Asomah, 2019; Idike, et al., 2020). Explanations whether women are interested in political acts or not are not well known. In this regard, dearth literature exists on the underlying factors of gender differences, specifically in Nigeria. Investigating these differences in interest in politics, participation and political activism has important implications for representative democracy, accountability, and good governance. Thus, this study tries to unpack the interest in politics, participation in socio-political activism, to either confirm or disprove the assertion that women remain less interested in politics as against their male counterparts, and to also find out if socio-demographic variable will affect interest in politics and participation in socio-political activism.

Individual demographic characteristics as well as psychological factors are believed to be capable of shaping the likelihood and nature of a group's level of activism. The desire to investigate this relationship can lead to the discovery of the role which these factors can play in the motivation and behaviors of the activists and the influence of such in contributing to the amendment of the socio-political system of the country. To guide this study, two research questions were raised and tested:

1. What is the relationship between socio-demographics, interest in politics and participation in socio-political activism?



2. Will socio-demographics and interest in politics determine participation in socio-political activism?

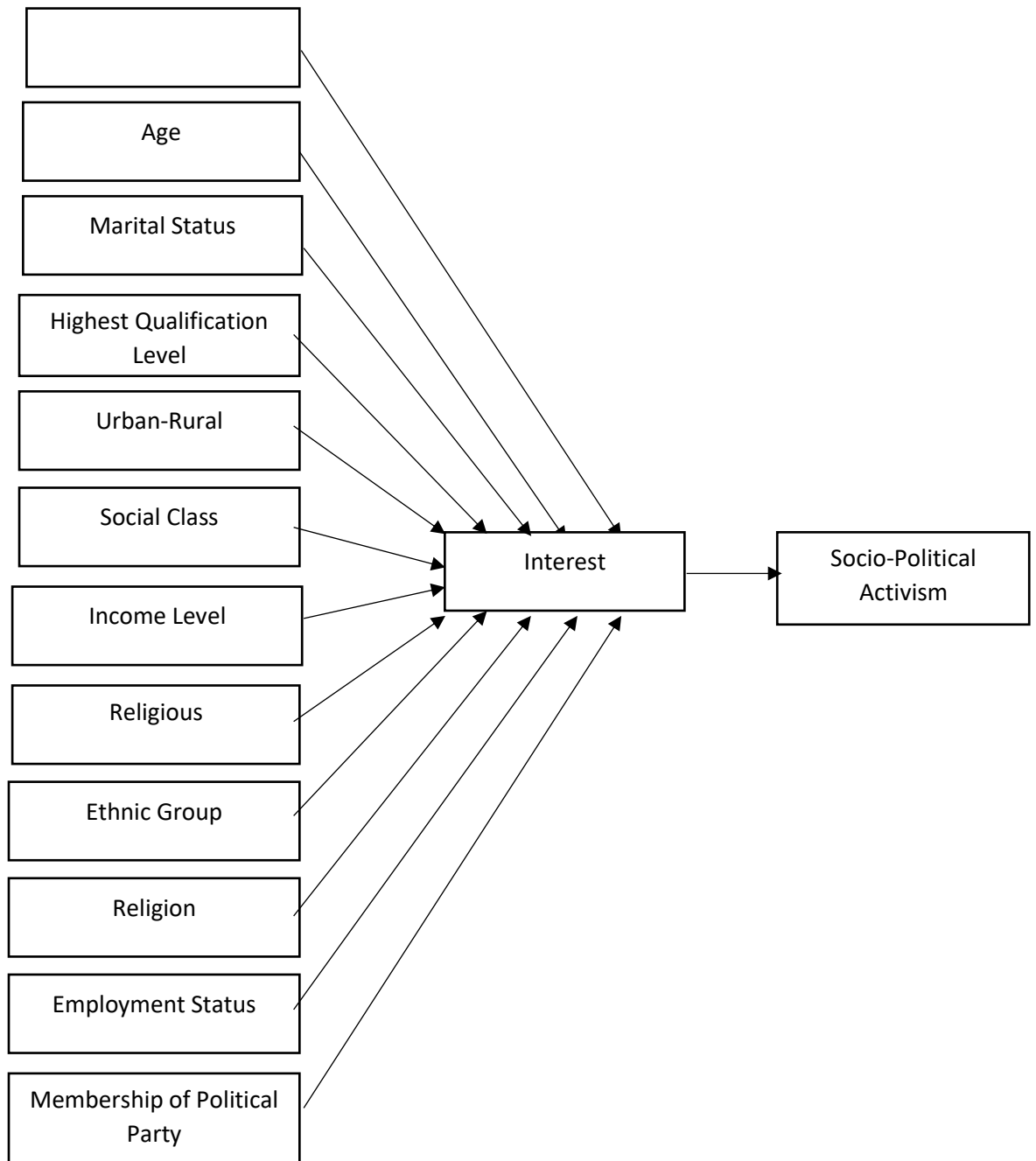


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

2. Methodology

2.1. Sample

The sample consisted of 1,227 respondents drawn from the seventh World Value Survey wave data for Nigeria, published in 2020 (World Values Survey, 2017-2022). In each country, the WVS data was independently collected using the random sampling method.

Nigeria is a Federal Republic of 36 States, with Abuja as the Federal Capital Territory. The states are divided into six geo-political regions, namely, the Southwest, the Southeast, the Northwest, the Northcentral, the Northeast, and the South-south (Figure 1). The country shares frontiers in the west by Benin Republic; in the east by Chad and Cameroon; and in the north with the Niger Republic. Its southern coast lies on the Atlantic Ocean in the Gulf of Guinea. With a total population estimated at 206,139,589 million in 2020, Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, with approximately 51.2 % residing in urban areas (Worldometer, 2024).



Figure 2: Map of Nigeria showing the 36 States, the Federal capital Territory and six geo-political regions



2.2. Measures

Dependent variable of socio-political activism was measured with items on the questionnaire. The items include: (i) Signing a petition, (ii) Joining in boycotts (iii) Attending peaceful demonstrations (iv). Joining strikes and (v) Any other act of protest. etc. The independent variables include socio-demographic characteristics (gender, marital status, age, geo-political region, social class, highest education attained, ethnic group, employment, status, and income interest in politics.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data obtained were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Minimum, maximum, mean scores, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis were determined. Also, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was done to present the nature of the relationship among the variables while the relative and combined influence of socio-demographic variables and interest in politics in determining participation in socio-political activism was done with multiple regression.

3. Results of Data Analyses

3.1. Respondents' Background Information

The demographic characteristics of respondents showed that the male (50.5%) and the female (49.5%) participated in the study. Most of the respondents are in age group of 25 to 34 years, with a mean age of 30 years. As for the social class, 2.6% of the respondents are in the upper class, 11.8% are in the upper middle class, 17.7% are from the working class while 41.4% are in the lower class. One-quarter is from the Southwest region, and 9.5% is from the Southeast. South-south has 13.1% and the Northeast has 10.8% and 13.2% respectively. Northwest has 24.0% while 18.9% are from North central. On marital status, 54.9% are married while 40.6% are single. The widow/widower and divorced/separated are 1.9% and 1.1% respectively. Fifty-one percent of the respondents are from rural areas, 49 % of the respondents are from urban areas. A majority (57.7%) of the respondents belong to the medium-income earners category, 35.2% of the respondents are in the low-income category while only 7.1% of the respondents belong to the high-income class.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. D	Skewness (SE = .071)	Kurtosis (SE = .141)
Interest in politics	1	4	2.43	1.163	.080	-1.456
How often are political matters discussed with friends?	1	3	2.08	.700	-.106	-.959
Political action: Signing a petition	1	3	2.60	.622	-1.315	.592
Political action: Joining in boycotts	1	3	2.70	.551	-1.690	1.892
Political action: Attending lawful/peaceful demonstrations	1	3	2.28	.761	-.521	-1.103
Political action: Joining unofficial strikes	1	3	2.34	.758	-.647	-.989
Social activism: Donating to a group or campaign	1	3	2.32	.732	-.588	-.937
Social activism: Contacting a government official	1	3	2.28	.681	-.409	-.839
Social activism: Encouraging others to take action about political issues	1	3	2.30	.737	-.534	-1.000
Social activism: Encouraging others to vote	1	3	1.82	.808	.333	-1.393
Political actions online: Searching information about politics and political events	1	3	2.19	.811	-.363	-1.388
Political actions online: Signing an electronic petition	1	3	2.64	.571	-1.339	.800
Political actions online: Encouraging other people to take any form of political action	1	3	2.41	.711	-.768	-.680
Political actions online: Organising political activities, events, protests	1	3	2.50	.666	-.991	-.207
Interest in Political	2.00	7.00	4.4925	1.65975	.025	-1.186
Socio-Political Activism	12.00	36.00	28.5125	5.60133	-.422	-.697

Results in Table 1 revealed that respondents' interest in politics was moderate ($\bar{x} = 4.493 \pm 1.667$) and high socio-political activism ($\bar{x} = 28.513 \pm 5.601$). Respondents have high political actions. They sign petitions ($\bar{x} = 2.60 \pm .622$), join boycotts ($\bar{x} = 2.70 \pm .551$), attend lawful/peaceful demonstrations ($\bar{x} = 2.28 \pm .761$) and unofficial strikes ($\bar{x} = 2.38 \pm .758$). On social activism, it can be inferred that participants have high interest in social activism. They donate to groups and campaigns ($\bar{x} = 2.32 \pm .732$), contact government officials ($\bar{x} = 2.28 \pm .681$) and encourage others to act on political issues ($\bar{x} = 2.30 \pm .737$). However, they do not encourage others to vote ($\bar{x} = 1.82 \pm .808$). Furthermore, the respondents participate highly in political activism online. They search for information about politics and political events ($\bar{x} = 2.19 \pm .811$), sign electronic petition ($\bar{x} = 2.64 \pm .571$), encourage other people to take any form of political action and organise political activities, events, and protests.

3.2. Interest in Politics

From Fig 1, only 22 % of the respondents said they are very interested, 31.0% answered interested, 27.0% not very interested while 20.0% were not at all interested. This implies that an average Nigerian is apolitical.

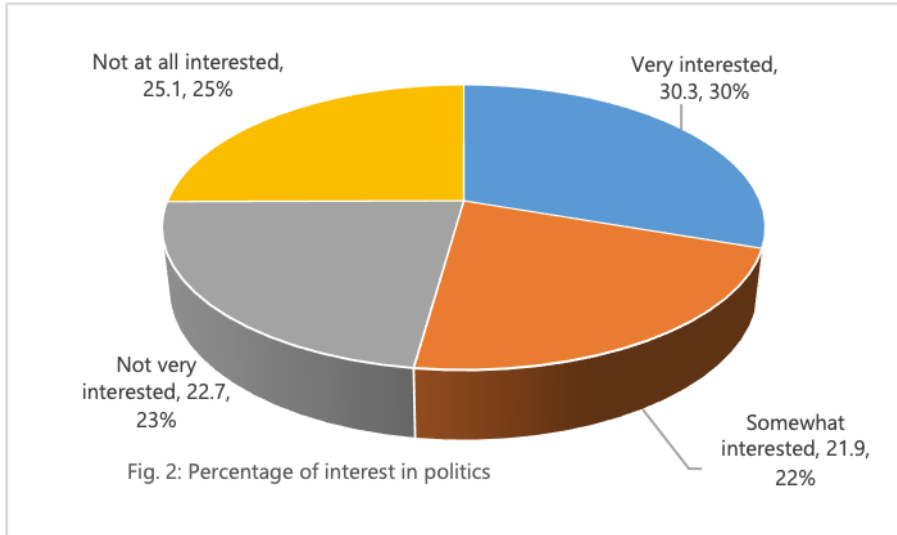
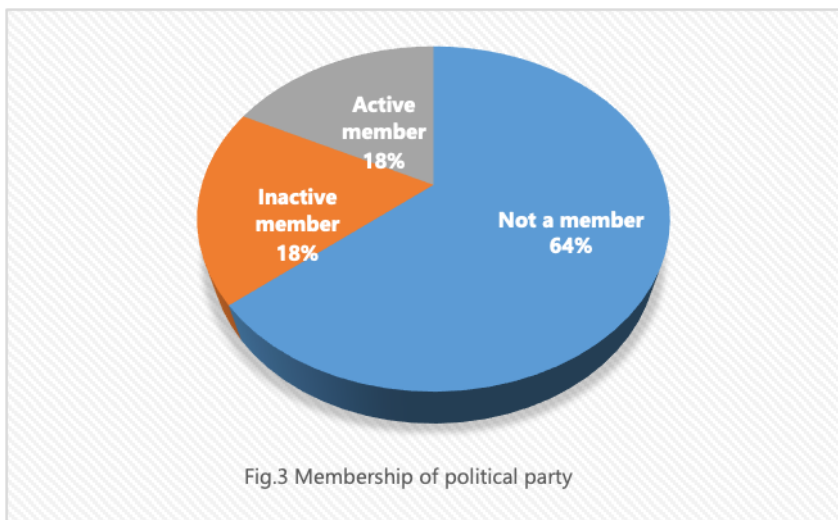


Figure 2 shows the respondents' responses to the item 'membership of political party'. The result shows that two-third, that is 66% were not a member of a political party. Only 10.0% are active member while 24.0% are inactive. This result corroborates the results in Figure 1.



The Pearson product moment correlation explored the relationship among socio-demographic variables, interest in politics and participation in socio-political activism indicated in Table 2. Moderate to strong positive and negative relationships were found. Interest in politics and socio-political activism ($r = .451$, $p = 0.001$) were strongly related. Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, gender was also positively related to

interest in politics as well as political activism. There was also a positive correlation between respondents' social class, employment status, and interest in politics as well as political activism. Age positively correlated with political activism. On the correlation between some respondents' socio-demographic variables (educational level and geo-political region), a positive correlation was found between interest in politics and socio-political activism ($r = .451, p = 0.001$).

Table 2: The Correlation between socio-demographic variables, interest in politics and socio-political activism

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Gender	1													
2. Age	-.055	1												
3. Marital status	-.200**	-.439**	1											
4. Highest educational	-.137**	-.129**	.194**	1										
5. Employment status	.103**	-.224**	.239**	-.023	1									
6. Social class	.066*	.056	-.136**	-.192**	.115**	1								
7. Income level	-.095**	-.047	.081**	.148**	-.119**	-.471**	1							
8. Religious	.001	.061*	-.199**	-.197**	.049	.084**	-.042	1						
Ethnic group	-.014	.031	-.047	-.148**	-.039	.047	.085**	.239**	1					
9. Urban-Rural	.023	.009	-.036	.018	.098**	.173**	-.159**	.022	-.140**	1				
10. Geo-politics Region	.003	-.068*	-.090**	.108**	.123**	.103**	-.131**	.374**	.004	.307**	1			
11. Membership-political party	-.173**	.054	.014	.113**	-.095**	-.035	.013	-.030	-.012	.059*	-.004	1		
12. Interest in politics	.287**	-.067*	.038	-.083**	.057*	-.021	-.003	-.105**	.027	-.105**	-.170**	-.485**	1	
13. Socio-Political Activism	.289**	.011	-.191**	-.322**	.078*	.155**	-.064*	.269**	.166**	.007	.085**	-.402**	.451**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 reveals the combined effects and the relative contribution of each independent variable to participation in socio-political activism. Findings revealed .649 as regression value for the combined effects an adjusted R2 of .414. This suggests that 41.4% of the variance in the criterion was accounted for by the independent variables. Analysis also shows that the F-value of 56.827 is statistically significant at $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.05$. This



shows a significant influence of the predictor variables on the participation in socio-political activism by Nigerians. Interest in politics was the most potent indicator of participation in socio-political activism ($\beta = 1.192$; $t = 12.296$; $p < .05$), followed by gender ($\beta = 1.148$; $t = 3.916$; $p < .05$).

Table 3: Multiple regression analysis of socio-demographic factors and interest in politics on participation in socio-political activism

	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	206681.443	31123.575		6.641	.000
Gender	1.148	.293	.103	3.916	.000
Age	-.094	.136	-.019	-.687	.492
Marital status	-.194	.067	-.085	-2.906	.004
Highest educational level:	-.365	.055	-.175	-6.640	.000
Employment status	.060	.073	.021	.830	.407
Social class	.457	.134	.095	3.415	.001
Income level	.514	.259	.054	1.982	.048
Religious denominations	.649	.096	.193	6.777	.000
Ethnic group	2.069E-5	.000	.088	3.497	.000
Urban-Rural	.278	.291	.025	.953	.341
Region	.160	.084	.055	1.907	.057
Membership: political party	-1.311	.197	-.182	-6.643	.000
Interest	1.192	.097	.354	12.296	.000

R = .649

R² = .421

Adjusted R² = .414; F (13, 1016) = 56.827, $p < .001$

Predictors: (Constant), interest, ethnic group, social class, age, urban-rural, highest educational level, employment status, religious, gender, membership: political party, income level, region, marital status

a. Dependent Variable: Socio-Political Activism

Table 3 demonstrates the differential influence of the predictor variables to the variance in the participation in socio-political activism. The interest in politics had a significant positive regression weight indicating that individuals with higher interest in politics were expected to participate in socio-political activism. Gender had the highest beta value (0.533), interest in politics (0.505), followed by the social class (0.289), age (0.248), employment status (0.148), marital status (0.087), region (-0.264), and the highest education level attained (-0.183).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper was based on the World Value Survey data for Nigerian Wave 7 and investigated the relationship between some demographic factors such as gender, age, social class, age employment status, educational level and marital status, socio-political activism, and interest in politics/participation in political activism. The outcomes of the study established the influence of gender and interest in politics on political participation in Nigeria. This is consistent with Fridkin and Kenney (2007) political views on gender differences and political attitudes. Some socio-demographics and interest in politics and participation in political activism were found to be significant. Our analysis suggests that political interest may be substantially more potent in predicting socio-political activism, a finding with implications for research and practice.

The correlation results indicated that the relationship between socio-demographic variables of gender, age, social class, highest educational level, social class, and employment status, and the participation of men and women in political activism are in concord with the submissions by Bolzendahl, and Coffé (2013) and Ngwu et al. (2022) which reported a correlation between demographic characteristic (gender) and political activities. Multiple regression analysis indicated that the predictor variables (gender, region, employment status, highest education attained and interest in politics) engendered participation in political activism by Nigerians.

This result is consistent with Dim and Asomah's (2019) findings regarding the socio-economic factors that predict women's political participation in Nigeria. He reported that education, place of residence, party affiliation, and geo-political zone are the predictors of political participation. However, United Nations (UN, 2015) asserted that women remain overwhelmingly alienated from the political arena in every part of the world, mostly due to patriarchal rules, policies, perceptions, low levels of education, gender stereotypes, lack of access to health care, and disproportionate effects of poverty on women. Despite, the fact that there is a positive relationship between gender and interest in politics, lopsidedness in women political participation still exists. This calls for a further probe as it could be a new normal that is probably due to the current propaganda on the need to involve more women in politics and political appointments.

This paper has thus far confirmed that no single factor can predict human behaviour. The study has shown that there is a relationship among socio-demographic factors and interest in politics and citizens' participation in socio-political activism in Nigeria. More precisely, to predict involvement in political activism by Nigerians, the socio-demographic characteristics of individuals are very important and relevant.

The fact that one of the findings revealed a moderate interest but correlation with high socio-political activism implies that there could be some other latent factors which may be responsible for this correlation. For instance, the study revealed that despite this correlation, the respondents expressed a position which revealed their non-readiness to



engage others to vote. This could probably be due to political apathy, and past experiences like electoral violence, rigging, disenfranchisement and unwarranted litigation.

The results have important implications for achieving SDGs goal 5 of (achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls) and more precisely, goal 5:5 'Ensuring full and effective participation of women and equal leadership opportunities at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life' (United Nations, 2019). Therefore, if the goal 5 and the target (5:5) of the SDGs are to be achieved, women need to be economically empowered so that they can be financially capable of vying for political offices.

The Second implication is related to women education. There is abundant evidence (Dim and Asomah, 2019; Mlambo and Kapingura, 2019) associating formal education with participation in politics by men and women. Getting more women to acquire formal education will provide them opportunities for acquisition of knowledge and communication skills which are necessary for public debate, and training in political analysis.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings of this study, it is important to note that gender, age, level of education, and economic status/income level are some of the factors that can influence people's propensity to either fully or partially participate in socio-political activism.

Government and its relevant agencies would need to stop seeing socio-political activism as a tool of confronting any government in power. Rather, it is high time such intervention became perceived as a wakeup call for good governance. Avenues for embracing and listening to such calls must be made available for the nation to promote political maturity and be seen to be democratising its dealings with the citizens.

Furthermore, conscious, and deliberate efforts must be made to remove every discriminatory constitutional, institutional, socio-cultural, and religious beliefs that hinder women's participation in politics. Patriarchal values need to change and be replaced with gender-neutral values.

Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

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