

## Women Participation in Electoral Process and Socio-Economic Development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria 2011-2021

**Emem Ubong Iyoho**

Department of Public Administration  
School of Management Sciences  
National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)  
Email: reachememiyoho@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

*Women have traditionally had low levels of participation in politics and decision-making positions. The challenge of women's participation in the electoral process in Nigeria in general and Akwa Ibom State, in particular, gained additional significance, since the return of democracy in 1999. Full and equal involvement in political and electoral processes is one of the hardest litmus tests for women's empowerment and gender equality. This study examined the impact of women's participation in the electoral process on the socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria 2011-2021. The study adopted the cross-sectional design and survey method where copies of the questionnaire were administered to 300 sample respondents being the sample size of the study. Data analysis was done using simple percentages and a chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistical tool. Findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between women's participation in the electoral process and the socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom State, through accreditation and voting during an election. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the Akwa Ibom State government should increase women's awareness level of voter registration by organizing seminars/workshops not only in the cities but also in the villages. Also, appropriate laws should be enacted (if the available ones are not enough or are limited in scope) and rigorously enforced to drastically reduce the negative nature of elections in the state to enable a level playing ground for all devoid of threats, harassment and intimidations which are not women friendly.*

**Keywords:** Women Participation, Election, Accreditation, Voting and Development.

### **Introduction**

Full and equal involvement in political and electoral processes is one of the hardest litmus tests for women's empowerment and gender equality, (Ballington, Bardall, Palmieri & Sullivan, 2015). Even though around the world today, democracy has become the pillar in which nations are building the hope of attaining sustainable development, the definition of democracy remains elusive. Politics remain an integral part of democracy bearing the traditional definition which characterizes it as male-dominated and excluding women. But it need not be stressed that women's political engagement is vital to democracy.

Women's active participation in politics is critical to the functioning of a democratic government. Women and girls continue to be kept out of politics across the world due to restrictive laws and institutional impediments, discriminatory cultural norms, and disproportionately inadequate access to education, healthcare, and resources (Nikolic & Stajanovic, 2014). It is also important to ensure that women are adequately represented among electoral administrators to protect their participation rights, including the right to serve in public office.

In Nigeria, despite the significant roles of women before and after independence, the development of corresponding economic, social and political power is still wanting. In pre-colonial Nigeria, women rose to notoriety due to their accomplishments or commercial involvement.

Women have traditionally had low levels of participation in politics and decision-making positions (Chatterjee, 2007; Asher & Basnett, 2016). The challenge of women's participation in the electoral process in Nigeria in general and Akwa Ibom State, in particular, gained additional significance at the return of democracy in 1999. 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections saw women actively taking part in electoral processes to change the dynamics and status quo of a male-dominated model of politics. Participating in political campaigns as a volunteer for a political candidate and voting in the election are two additional forms of female participation in the electoral process that are particularly relevant to this research (Iwuoha, 2018)

### **Statement of the Problem**

Women's participation in Nigerian politics is mostly visible at the level of voting and latent support, according to meticulous observations (Ady, 2008). Violence and other types of electoral conflict committed and promoted by males and male youths have been cited by many writers as important impediments facing and restraining women's active engagement in Nigerian politics. Arguments on what role women should play in society are becoming common. Opinions differ on whether women's roles are primarily domestic or if they may participate in other socio-economic and political activities alongside their male counterparts. While the natural link between a mother and her child may constrain and limit her to sedentary activities, it is equally vital for such a mother to give her fair share to the growth of her family and society at large.

Women's lack of political engagement is growing seriously and concerning. This prevents women from contributing their fair share to Nigeria's growth. Women in positions of responsibility are known to be industrious and resolute in their decisions, according to empirical findings (Agishi, 2014; Goerge et al., 2016).

Despite the tremendous efforts made by government and non-governmental organizations in response to the Beijing Declaration, which advocated for 30 per cent affirmative action for more inclusive representation of women in elective and appointive positions, Nigeria's women are still marginalized due to the country's leadership style (Iwuoha, 2018). Since the creation of Akwa Ibom state in 1987 and the emergence of democratic rule in 1999, women's engagement in politics has been confined to offering support to male politicians, hence, the absence of equal representation of women in the electoral policy process in Akwa Ibom state is a societal concern. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to assess the impact of women's participation in the electoral process on the socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, 2011 – 2021.

### **The Objective of the Study**

The main objective of this study was to assess the impact of women's participation in the electoral process on the socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, 2011 – 2022.

The specific objective is:

To ascertain the extent of women's involvement in accreditation and voting exercise on socio-economic development in Akwa Ibom State, 2011 – 2022.

### **Research Question**

To what extent does women's involvement in accreditation and voting exercise enhance the socio-

economic development in Akwa Ibom State between 2011 – 2021?

### Research Hypothesis

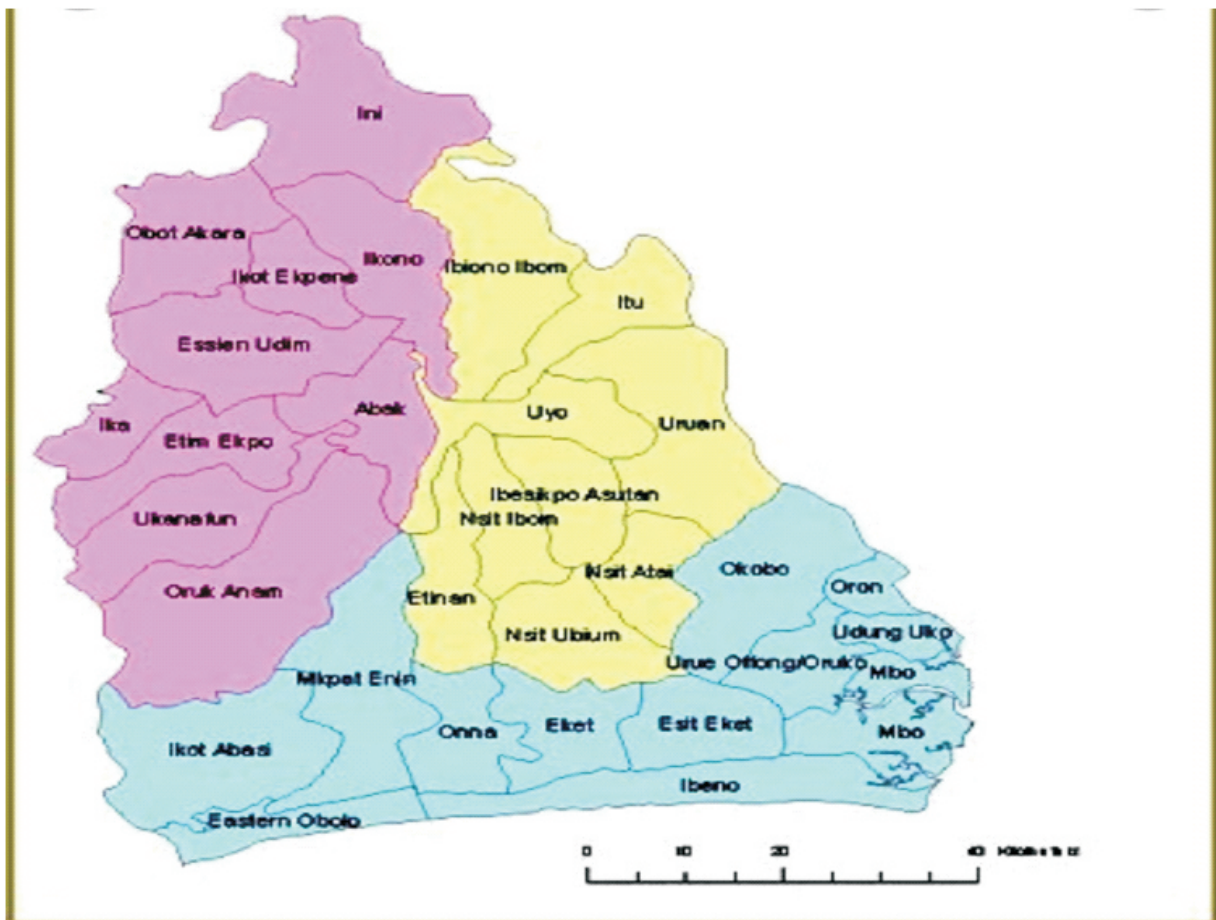
HO: There is no significant relationship between women's participation in accreditation and voting exercises and the socio-economic development in Akwa Ibom State.

### Area of Study

The study area is Akwa Ibom State. Akwa Ibom State is bordered on the east by Rivers State, on the west by Cross River State, on the north by Abia State, and the South by the Gulf of Guinea. It has a total land area of 7,249 square kilometres. In terms of land mass, it is Nigeria's tenth-biggest state (Sub-Natural Area Database, 2018).

Akwa Ibom State is one of the 36 states that make up the Nigerian Federation with Uyo as the state capital is split into 31 Local Government Areas namely: Eket, Ikot Ekpene, Ikot Abasi, Oron, Abak, Itu, Etinan, Ibeno and other large towns among them (NPC 2016).

The people of Akwa Ibom State are culturally homogenous and have a shared identity. They are said to be the original settlers in today's South Eastern Nigeria. Ibibio, Annang and Oron are the three primary dialectal groupings. Eket, Ibeno, Itu Mbonuso, and the Andonis are some of the other



## **Review of Related Literature**

### **Electoral Process in Nigeria**

According to Daerego, Dokubo & Amachree (20120), a stable electoral process is the most desirable democratic experience Nigerians have looked out for in the twenty years of uninterrupted democracy. This atmosphere had been heated up at various moments leading to abuse of power, fraudulent elections, oppression of political opponents, intimidation of journalists and corruption of the electoral process. Agi (2012) notes that the prevailing political experience of various nations directly informs the political institutions, structures and activities, inclinations, loyalties and associations which are identifiable. Sequel to this, there is no meaningful electoral process without the citizens and education. To this, Ojie (2006) states that in a democracy, those whose responsibility is to exercise political authority in a society perform it with the explicit consent and genuine mandate expressed at periodic intervals by the electorate through an open, free and fair electoral process. This implies that the pivot of any electoral process is the citizens who are 18 years and above (adults). Also, these citizens are compulsorily given voter education, to enable them to have high-quality information to enhance the electoral process. In the absence of this, imposition of different sorts will be experienced in the execution of the electoral process which is part and parcel of the community development programmes as expressed by Amirize in Kobani & Alozie (2016).

The electoral process in Nigeria takes the form of choosing representatives from the Nigerian Federal Government and the various states. Nigerians elect, at the federal level, the Head of State (the President of Nigeria) and the legislature (the National Assembly). The President is elected by the people. The National Assembly has two chambers. The House of Representatives has 360 members, elected for a four-year term; each of the 36 states is divided into 3 senatorial districts, which are represented by one senator, and the federal capital territory is represented by only one senator. Nigeria has a multi-party system, with two leading political parties namely: The All Progressive Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). However, members of the People's Democratic Party founded in 1998, controlled the presidency until 2015 when Muhammadu Buhari of the APC won the presidential election.

The genesis of the electoral process was the establishment of the electoral umpire through the Nigerian Constitution in 1998 by the then Military administration of General Abdulsalam Abubakar after dissolving the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) which was established in December 1995 by the then-General Sani Abacha's government (INEC, 2010). This body is a juridical person that may sue and be sued in its name (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 1999). Nigeria is carried out through the following procedures: voter registration, balloting and vote tabulation processes, political party registration and candidate filings, accreditation of the polling station, voting day, record of registered voters and PVCS collected, and announcement of the winner.

### **Women Participation in Electoral Process and Socio-Economic Development in Akwa Ibom State**

There is increased attention on the participation of women in electoral processes, as such is crucial to the establishing and maintaining of democratic inclusion. Women's political engagement leads to real improvements in democracy, such as better citizen response, stronger collaboration across party and ethnic boundaries, and more enduring peace. The variety of policy concerns that are taken into consideration and the kinds of solutions that are put forward are both influenced by the meaningful engagement of women in politics. The presence of women in politics is essential to reflect the concerns of women and other disenfranchised people and to enhance the

responsiveness of policy-making and governance. Research shows that a legislator's gender has a different influence on policy goals. Additionally, when more women take up leadership roles within their political parties, these groups are more likely to give priority to problems that affect people's health, education, and other aspects of quality of life. Strong evidence suggests that when more women are elected to government, there is a corresponding rise in policy-making that takes families, women, and ethnic and racial minorities' concerns into account. Women's political participation affects communities, legislatures, political parties, and citizen lives in profoundly good and democratic ways (Wollack, 2010).

A surge in female members of parliament led to laws addressing anti-discrimination, domestic violence, family codes, inheritance, and child support and protection. For instance, newly elected female legislators introduced new labour laws that would give working mothers mandatory nursing breaks and provide on-site childcare for companies with more than 200 employees, only five years after the women's suffrage movement in Kuwait won the right for women to vote and run for office. Because of the historic role that women have played as mothers and caregivers in their communities, women legislators tend to see "women's" concerns more generally as societal issues (Akpan, 2018).

Additionally, more women see government as a vehicle to aid underrepresented or minority groups (Camissa & Reingold, 2004). As a result, women's involvement in the electoral process is often seen as more receptive to constituent demands and sensitive to societal issues. Women have a strong commitment to post-conflict rebuilding and peacebuilding, and they offer a distinctive and potent viewpoint to the bargaining table. Women often endure unjustifiable suffering during armed conflict and frequently make the strongest arguments in favour of stability, rebuilding, and the end of current hostilities. When women are included, peace accords, post-conflict rebuilding, and governance have a higher chance of long-term success (Chinkin, 2003). Furthermore, creating a lasting peace requires altering the way power is distributed, including developing more equal gender relations (Strickland & Duvvury, 2003).

Women have developed inter-community coalitions to foster communication and are running facilities to rehabilitate former kidnapped girls and child soldiers against fierce opposition from male leaders (International Crisis Group, 2006). Women tend to operate in a less hierarchical, more participative, and more collaborative manner than their male counterparts, and as a result, their leadership and conflict-resolution philosophies often incorporate democratic values (Rosenthal, 2001). Even in highly politicized circumstances, women are more likely than males to collaborate across party lines. Women have been instrumental in creating the first cross-party caucus in Rwanda, where they have 56 per cent of the seats, to work on contentious topics including food security and land rights. To coordinate response legislation and guarantee the provision of fundamental services, they have also established the unique tripartite cooperation between civil society and executive and legislative entities (Powley, 2003).

### **Women's Involvement in Accreditation and Voting**

Election Management Bodies (EMBs) are obligated to consider the unique difficulties that women may face throughout the voting process and to implement efforts to counteract such difficulties. Every registered voter should be able to cast their ballot privately, without fear of reprisal, and have their ballot tallied as part of the final tally for the election to be considered genuine (UN Women & UNDP, 2016).

A closer look at Nigeria's international obligation requires that Egyptian authorities take strong steps to ensure that women participate in the electoral process on an equal basis not only as voters, but also as candidates, election administrators, and policymakers (United Nations, 2017).

The women made history with their participation as voters in the 2013 Constituent Assembly elections, turning out in record numbers to cast their votes for members of a constituent Assembly tasked with drafting the country's democratic constitution. (Nepal: Gender Book "Her Voice Her Choice", 2013).

Agbalajobi (2010) noted that women's increase in political participation is measured by such factors as:

- i. The number of women who vote
- ii. The number of public offices held by women
- iii. The number of women-related policies implemented by the government

Although Nigerian women participate mostly in rallies, campaigns, voter registration, accreditation and voting. Women's numerical strength is in their numbers but irrelevant in governance. Statistics show that over 49% of the voter registration population is women yet only 7% are in governance (INEC, 2021).

The United Nations recognizes the need to protect and promote the rights of women to participate in the electoral process, particularly in post-conflict countries. Electoral rights are much more than simply the right to vote, but encompass freedom of expression, assembly and association, and the freedom to take part in the conduct of public affairs, hold public office at all levels of government, and participate in the formulation of government policy. United Nations international human rights instruments affirm that women are entitled to enjoy all these rights and freedoms on the same basis as men. Women's equal participation is essential to the conduct of democratic elections. For elections to be truly free and fair, women must have the same opportunities as men to participate in voting and accreditation during voting.

According to Edikan (2020), the 2019 voter registration data shows that a higher percentage of the registered voters were women (53.38%) compared to men (46.62%). At the same time, recent observations, and other data on previous elections also show that voter abstention has been on the increase since the first general elections. Past electoral results and voter registration data are not sex-disaggregated making it difficult to tell or distinguish the abstention rates between men and women as well as the factors influencing their voting patterns.

Akwa Ibom State Government report (2017) notes that there were more women than men who registered as voters with women constituting 53.38% and men 46.62% of the registered voters for the 2019 elections. Women are under pressure from local/community leaders and families (especially husbands in the case of married women) to register as voters even though some of them do not necessarily vote on election day. The misconception that the voter registration card is some kind of "access key" to many social and development benefits has resulted in voter registration becoming the objective and polling being ignored by many women. This misconception is attributed to misinformation by community/local leaders.

Ekpo (2018) also notes that whilst there is an increased awareness among urban-based women of their rights to participate in elections, their rural-based counterparts still lag far behind, most

women in rural areas do not understand the reasons why they vote. In both rural and urban areas, women's multiple gender roles tend to interfere with their participation in election civic education programs and electoral processes (polling) as a result of which many women, especially in rural areas continue to be left out. Some religious beliefs constitute a barrier to women's participation by limiting their role in the political life of the country. Massive participation at election campaign rallies by women is motivated by the prospect of receiving the election campaign visibility materials (banners, t-shirts, caps, etc.) which are considered to be of benefit to many. Loss of hope or confidence that their vote will bring positive changes in society such as employment and good roads creates apathy among both young women and older women.

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Table 1: Voter Turnout of Women from 2011 to 2019

Year	Voter Turnout	Total Vote	Registration	VAP Turnout	Voting Age Population	Population
2011	28.66%	21,074,621	73,528,040	25.80%	81,691,751	155,215,573
2015	43.65%	29,432,083	67,422,005	32.11%	91,669,312	18,562,056
2019	32.14%	26,468,211	82,344,007	24.86%	106,490,312	208,679,114
2011	53.68%	39,469,484	73,528,040	48.32%	81,691,751	155,215,573
2015	43.65%	29,432,083	67,422,005	32.11%	91,669,312	181,562,056
2019	34.75%	28,614,190	82,344,107	26.87%	106,490,312	208,679,114

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA, 2021)

Table 2: Number of Female Registered Voters in Nigeria

2015				2019		
States	No of Voters	%		No of Voters	%	
Abia	1,057,384	49.9		1,063,424	50.1	
Adamawa	1,002,683	45.0		1,193,833	54.4	
Akwa Ibom	1,131,543	42.1		1,223,875	51.9	
Anambra	1,344,614	50.5		1,311,803	49.4	
Bauchi	1,181,760	43.0		1,567,508	57.0	
Bayelsa	48,767	40.4		566,095	53.6	
Benue	1,336,101	47.7		1,451,626	52.3	
Borno	1,070,570	42.6		1,442,211	57.4	
Cross River	871,843	49.4		894,623	50.5	
Delta	1,584,575	49.2		1,637,122	50.8	
Ebonyi	874,841	54.8		722,805	45.2	
Edo	1,192,855	41.9		1,303,228	52.1	
Ekiti	502,251	50.9		485,396	49.1	



Enugu	1,139,750	53.9	973,043	46.1	
Fct	713,345	45.4	856,962	54.6	
Gombe	669,808	42.5	905,986	57.5	
Imo	1,220,659	50.4	1,199,263	49.6	
Jigawa	1,141,803	48.6	1,209,490	51.4	
Kaduna	2,000,903	46.2	2,334,305	53.8	
Kano	2,629,079	44.4	3,292,291	55.6	
Katsina	29,355	49.2	1,787,364	50.8	
Kebbi	035,572	45.0	1096449	54.0	
Kogi	978,713	50.6	953941	45.4	
Kwara	820172	48.4	875755	51.5	
Lagos	3256799	46.1	3803396	53.9	
Nasarawa	915958	48.2	983266	51.8	
Niger	1152185	47.7	1546159	57.3	
Ogun	1365797	50.5	1322508	47.2	
Ondo	985247	49.5	1006097	50.5	
Osun	1031362	52.8	923438	47.2	
Oyo	165682	50.6	1619863	49.4	
Plateau	1386462	49.2	1403066	50.3	
Rivers	1243207	47.0	1320451	49.2	
Sokoto	1365797	50.5	1322508	47.2	
Taraba	1,344,614	50.5	1,311,803	49.4	
Yobe	1152185	47.7	1546159	57.3	
Zamfara	1,584,575	49.2	1,637,122	50.8	

Source: Nigeria Galleries (2021)

The above table shows the total number of women registered as voters in Nigeria. In Akwa Ibom state, the number of women that register is increasing yearly, indicating the likelihood of increased women participation in the electoral process in the state within the period of analysis.

Akwa Ibom state women feel that participating in politics is their fundamental human right and that doing so would not prevent them from adequately caring for their families. This does not hamper their primary domestic responsibilities, the desire to raise responsible children, as such, the fear of having shattered homes because of political participation does not exist. Also, women, in their gradual consciousness, in recent times, have increasingly sought power equations, as well as the distribution/redistribution of resources in their favour. Nevertheless, a careful observation indicates that the involvement of women in Nigerian politics is largely noticeable at the level of voting and latent support (Adeniyi, 2003).

According to Arowolo & Aluko (2010), arguments are on the increase regarding the specific role women should play in society. Opinions are divided on whether the role of women is predominantly in the home front or whether women can also engage in other socio-economic and political activities like their male counterparts. It is however believed that while the natural relationship between the mother and her child may compel and confine her to sedentary activities, it is also important that mothers contribute their quota to the development of the family and that of society at large. Despite the argument that the political participation of women in Nigeria rose between 2015 and 2019, it is, however, restricted maximally to the appointive positions as only two of the women who contested for elective positions got elected (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010).

**Table 3:** List of Akwa Ibom State Contestants in the 2019 Governorship Election

S/N	Names	Political Party	Male	Female
1	Nsima Ekere	APC	1	0
2	Issac Iniobong	PDC	1	0
3	Udom Emmanuel	PDP	1	0
4	Enyenihi victor	FJP	1	0
5	Ekonf mfon	PPA	1	0
6	Edet Inwang	DPP	1	0
7	Obot udeme	ADC	1	0
8	Iboro Robert	ANRP	1	0
9	Brown Samuel	UPN	1	0
10		ADP	1	0
	Ukeme Uko			
11	Okpongete Emmanuel	AAP	1	0
12	Nsisong Issac	BNPP	1	0

13	Tim Joseph	ACD	1	0
14	Effion okon	PPN	1	0
15	Obong Samuel	ABP	1	0
16	Ezekiel Aniekan	YDP	1	0
17		PPP	1	0
18	Ekpong Eyo	PPP	1	0
19	Udo Nature	YPP	1	0
20	Ekanam Aniekan	DPC	1	0
21	Ito ro ekpa	GPN	0	1
22	Samuel David	AD	1	0
23	Okon Daniel	NNPP	1	0
24	Umoekoyo okon	UPP	1	0
25	Roger Grace	UPC	0	1
26	Abasiakan Samuel	LP	1	0
27	Asukaso Daur	SDP	1	0
28	Effiong Ndarake	ANDP	1	0
29	Patrick Usen	ZLP	1	0
30	Joseph Okon	ACCORD	1	0
31	Divine Solomon	AGAP	1	0
32	Sunday Erasmus	PRP	1	0
33	Christopher Bassey	NRM	1	0
34	Okon Uko	MPN	1	0
35	Benedict Johnson	DA	1	0
36	Bassey Edet	JMPP	1	0
37	George Nsidibe	NCMP	1	0
38	Etim David	CAP	1	0

39	Ayanga Sunday	HDP	1	0
40	Umoh Benjamine	C4C	1	0
41	Idoreyin Boniface	NAC	1	0
42	Emmanuel Offiong	NFD	1	0
43	Ime Udia	NEPP	1	0
44	Aniette Udo	CNP	1	0
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>42</b>	<b>2</b>

Source; inecnigeria.com (2019).

By and large, women are gradually being conscientised and mobilised into participating in politics, though efforts should also be sustained towards awakening them into productive and active participation in politics to realise the full productive capacity of the Nigerian preponderant population. This becomes imperative as the “irresistible role of women is capable of building strong democratic institutions that are acceptable and durable” (Adedeji, 2019).

## Theoretical Framework

### Liberal Feminism

This study is anchored on liberal feminism. Liberal feminism is a reformers' theory that holds that human beings are special in that they possess a capacity for reason, which sets them apart from other animals (Tong, 2018). Liberal feminism's main objective is to eliminate the public-private barrier that prevents gender equality in the public domain. The school of liberal feminism acknowledges the individual's intrinsic characteristics that may prevent fear of resource accumulation and opportunity creation in society based on beginning advantages and liabilities. According to Mill & Wollstonecraft (2018), a woman's incapacity to do a task that a typical male can complete does not mandate a legal or social restriction that prevents all women from pursuing it. As a consequence, liberal feminists supported affirmative action to advance political rights and gender equality and see the state as the defender of individual rights. According to Mill and Wollstonecraft (2018), a woman's incapacity to do a task that a typical male can complete does not mandate a legal or social restriction that prevents all women from pursuing it. Gender inequality is a defining feature of Nigerian politics, and this is because a certain gender is given priority. In Nigeria, it is generally accepted that a woman's place is in the house. Women are discriminated against beginning from the day they were born and continuing through their participation in politics. Women in Nigeria were granted the right to vote in 1957, 57 years after males first gained this right in 1922. Women are not allowed equal access to chances and resources that may encourage their involvement in political activities since they are the result of a patriarchal culture with an unethical double standard. Thus, according to liberal feminists, group identification, gender inequality, and the right to receive fair and reasonable treatment are all fundamental human rights.

The feminist political theory that promotes liberalism also advances the idea that men and women are of equal value politically. This is what we mean when we say that liberal feminist theory is both liberal and feminist (Warren, 1990). It is also a way of thinking critically about how liberal-

supported policies and social norms might work against the goal of achieving gender parity in the workplace. Individual liberty and political equality for males are central tenets of classical liberalism, which advocates for a small government (Locke, 2019).

Mankind's rational free, and equal members agree in the public realm to form a limited government to safeguard their liberties. Modern welfare liberals acknowledge the importance of personal responsibility and freedom of choice, but they also support a larger role for the state in promoting political equality. Since liberal feminists must adapt to shifting academic traditions, legal frameworks, and social norms, the term "liberal feminism" defies a succinct and precise definition.

Some liberal feminists, especially early liberal feminists, want to extend equality to women on the premise that women are rational beings similar to men, therefore fitting within the framework of classical liberalism. The concept of the state as a contractual arrangement among independent rational persons has been challenged by several scholars in recent years (Waston & Pateman, 1989). Liberal feminists may either work within the liberal theory to alter its effect on women or push the theory to its limits to accommodate feminist concerns (Philips, 2002).

The theory is relevant to this study because it states that a woman's inability to complete work that a normal male can finish does not necessitate a legal or social limitation that forbids all women from pursuing it (Nill and Wollstone-Craft, 2018). Liberal feminists saw the state as the protector of individual rights and backed affirmative action programmes that promote political rights and gender equality.

The liberal feminist theory provides valuable insight into the nature and causes of gender inequality in Nigeria. Due to their historical, biological, and cultural status as the weaker sex, women are not given the same opportunities as their male counterparts. Consequently, the economic and political fabric of society has been weakened. This undermines the logic of relegating their merits to purely internal issues. Thus, liberal feminist research creates philosophy, legislation, social practice and the critique of more inclusive social processes in the political participation of women in the electoral process.

## **2. Empirical Review**

Dikwal-Bot (2020) investigated how cultural and economic gender disparity are depicted on blogs written by Nigerian women. He focused on significant incidents of gender inequality in Nigeria, such as "President Muhammadu Buhari's opinion on his wife" and "rejection of the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill" to conduct a thematic analysis of 253 comments recovered from five female-authored blogs. Data study of Nigerian women's blogs revealed a pronounced intolerance for cultural change, in stark contrast to a more optimistic view of redistribution. Dikwal-Bot (2020) argues that campaigning for gender equality in Nigeria should start primarily from a redistributive stance to address this complication. For this to be successful, it must be paired with the more covert objective of becoming noticed.

Okoosi-Simbine & Obi's (2020) investigation of the past, present, and future of women's political engagement in Africa, and their outline of the continent's rising profile as a global leader in this area was inspiring. Cultural, social, and systemic barriers to women's successful engagement in politics are not unique to Africa. Okoosi-Simbine and Obi (2020) noted that many nations share these problems but that Africa has shown resilience and potential to breach the gendered glass barrier by generating three of the top ten countries with the most significant numbers of female legislators in the world. Nonetheless, Africa is also home to the lowest percentage of women in national legislatures worldwide. A gender quota was implemented to help remedy the lack of

female representation in government. Gender quotas are implemented in the context of structural and systemic gender inequities; this is not without criticism. Without addressing the cultural, structural, and systemic constraints to women's political exclusion, their inclusion through gender quotas would hardly lead to their sustained visibility in the political space, which is why gender quotas must be linked with social and economic redistributive justice in the society if Africa and the world are to achieve a sustained level of women's participation in politics (Okoosi-Simbine & Obi, 2020).

Oni (2009) reaffirmed the need to include both men and women in the work of development toward establishing a robust state in Africa. Since women are also significant participants in the development project, their participation in the leadership of a country will offer more excellent value to its domestic politics. However, they are marginalised in every aspect of political life. In many African nations, including Nigeria, women are politically marginalised due to sexist societal norms and institutionalised exclusion. For this reason, Oni (2009) takes a close look at some of the obstacles women in Nigeria face while trying to enter politics. He contends that home care, money politics, and political violence are hurdles to women's significant involvement in politics, governance, and decision-making in Nigeria, using historical and descriptive methodologies and is backed by patriarchy and liberal feminist theorists. He concludes that to increase women's political participation and ability to rise to positions of power in Nigerian politics, the country's government and political party leaders, as well as other stakeholders, need to implement policies and initiatives that empower them to do so.

### **Materials and Method**

The study used cross-section and time series design to explore different situations to better understand women's participation in the electoral process and socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom State. The population of the research consists of the entire population of women in Akwa Ibom State which is 2,680,687 (Ministry of Economic Development, Akwa Ibom State Projected Population 2021). The sample size was 300 respondents randomly selected within the three senatorial districts from designated organizations in Akwa Ibom State. However, a purposive technique was used to choose local government areas from each senatorial district while the questionnaire was distributed disproportionately. The breakdown of the sample size is as follows:

**Table 4: The Breakdown of Sample Size and Questionnaire Allocation**

S/N	Senatorial District/L.G.A	No. of Questionnaire
1	Akwa Ibom South (Eket senatorial district).	
	Eket L.G.Area	34
	Oron L.G.Area	33
	Ikot Abasi L.G.Area	33
2.		
	Uyo L.G.Area	34
	Ibiono Ibom L.G.Area	33
	Nsit Atai	33
3.	Akwa Ibom North – West (Ikot Ekpene senatorial district).	
	Ikot Ekpene L.G.Area	34
	Oruk Anam L.G.Area	33
	Ikono L.G.Area	33
	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>

The main instrument used in collecting data for this study was a well-designed questionnaire. Data for this research were collected from both primary and secondary sources and were analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics were frequency count and percentage analysis. The inferential statistics used for testing the hypotheses were chi-square (x<sup>2</sup>) statistical tool.

**Table 5: Bio Data of Respondents**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18-25	30	10
25-35	135	45
36-45	66	22
46-55	36	12
56-65	24	8
66 and above	9	3
Total	300	100
Education level		
Non-formal	2	0.7
Element	18	6
Secondary	64	21.3
Tertiary	216	72
	300	100
Employment status		
Self employed	84	28
Employer	28	9.3
Unpaid family worker	7	2.3
Government	1136	45.3
Casual	-	-
	300	100
Marital states		
Married	120	40
Single	110	37
Divorce	70	23
	300	100
Personality state		
Academics	60	20
Civil servant	90	30
Business women	98	33
House whole	52	17
	300	100



As revealed in Table 3, 10% were between 18 and 25 years, 45% were aged 26 to 35 years, 22% were aged 36 to 45 years, 12% fell between 46 – 55 years, 8% were 56 - 65 and 3% were aged more than 66 years. 79% represent the modal age group in the study. This indicates that about 70% of the participants were still within the active years of 25 – 65 years. It means the able-bodied population can contribute to socio-economic development activities.

On the educational level, 2 respondents representing 0.7% had no formal education, 18 respondents representing 6% had elementary education, 64 respondents representing 21.3 had secondary education and 216 respondents representing 72% had tertiary education.

Out of 300 Respondents, 84 were self-employed, 28 were employers, 7 were unpaid family workers and 136 were government staff. Also on marital status, 120 respondents representing 40% were married, 110 respondents representing 37% were single and 70 respondents representing 23% were divorced. The personality profile of the respondents was also analysed, 60 respondents were academics, 90 respondents were civil servants, 98 respondents were business women and 52 respondents were housewives.

Table 6: Responses to Research Question: To what extent does women's involvement in accreditation and voting exercise enhance the socio-economic development in Akwa Ibom State between 2011 – 2021?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
SA	107	36
A	42	14
SD	38	13
D	113	37
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 3 depicts that 36% of the respondents strongly agreed that there is a relationship between women's participation in the accreditation and voting process and the socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom state (2011- 2021). 14% agreed, 13% strongly disagreed and 37% disagreed with the assertion. Hence, it is shown that a higher percentage of the respondents strongly agreed that there is a relationship between women's participation in accreditation and the voting process and the socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom state (2011- 2021).

### Test of Hypothesis and Discussion

There is no significant relationship between women's participation in accreditation and the voting process and the socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom state (2011- 2021).

Table 7: Contingency Table on relationship between women's participation in accreditation and voting process and the socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom state (2011- 2021).

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
SA	107	36
A	32	14
SD	48	13
D	113	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: field survey, 2023

**Table 8: Chi-square Computed Table**

Variables	Fo	Fe	Fo-Fe	(Fo-Fe) <sup>2</sup>	$\frac{Fo - Fe)^2}{Fe}$
Strongly Agreed	107	75	32	1024	13.653
Agreed	32	75	-43	1849	24.653
Strongly Disagreed	48	75	-27	729	9.72
Disagreed	113	75	38	1444	19.25
Total	300	300			67.226

Calculated  $\chi^2 = 67.226$

Table  $\chi^2 = 2.257$  (at 50% confidence level of chi-square distribution)

### Decision Rule

Since the calculated chi-square value of 67.226 is greater than the critical value (chi-square table value) of 2.257, the null hypothesis (Ho) is therefore rejected. From the above analysis, there is a significant relationship between women's participation in the accreditation and voting process and the socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom state (2011- 2021).

In recent times, there have been agitations by women globally for adequate representation and participation in governmental positions (both in the legislature & executive). The idea is that women's political participation is a matter of human rights and gender equality, inclusive growth and general development. The active participation of women, on equal terms with men, at all levels of decision-making and political involvement is essential to the achievement of equality, democracy, peace, growth and sustainable development and the incorporation of their experiences and perspectives into the decision-making process (Mlambo & Kapingura 2019).

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between women's participation in the electoral process and the socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom state (2011- 2021). Findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between women's participation in the electoral process and the socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom state (2011- 2021) in accreditation and voting exercise. This finding agreed with Badawi (2007) who noted that in recent years, women have become more aware of their mental status and have sought to balance power and redistribute resources in their favour.

According to research in 2015, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) deployed a novelty information technology (IT) based voter accreditation technology. The Smartcard Reader (SCR), one of the greatest innovative technologies in Nigeria's electoral history, is a device which authenticates and verified the Permanent Voter Card (PVC) issued only by the Independent National Electoral Commission. According to Ayodele (2016), the use of voter accreditation technology significantly reduced the probability of bloody electoral violence among voters during general elections in Nigeria. This was to create enabling atmosphere for women to also take part in the accreditation and voting process. Olurode (2017) also revealed that the introduction of voter accreditation technology to the electoral process in Nigeria tremendously improved the process, enhanced the detection of electoral fraud, and reduced multiple voting.

Akwa Ibom State Government report (2017) noted that there were more women than men who registered as voters, with women constituting 53.38% and men 46.62% of the registered voters for the 2019 elections

## **Conclusion**

From a cultural and traditional perspective, women face a lot of hostility when they choose to participate in politics. In addition to the fact that most husbands do not allow their wives to participate in politics, the study revealed that presently many female respondents felt that participating in politics is their fundamental human right and would not prevent them from adequately caring for their families. Their domestic responsibilities, the desire to raise responsible children, and the fear of having shattered homes are insignificant to their political participation. However, from the foregoing, it is obvious that Akwa Ibom state women take an active part in electoral processes, especially in voters' registration. This can provide direction on the choices of the leader through the democratic process, hence, contributing to the socioeconomic development of the state. According to research, up to 26% of Akwa Ibom voters are women who also seeks to take part in government decision about economic development (Akpan, 2018).

## **Recommendation**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Akwa Ibom State government should increase women's awareness level on voter registration by organizing seminars/workshops, not only in the cities but also in the villages.
2. Akwa Ibom State government should encourage free and fair elections by providing security to ensure conducive and a crime-free environment to encourage women's participation in the election.
3. Akwa Ibom State government, through various agencies such as National Orientation Agency and the mass media, should adopt strategies towards the reorientation of the public vis-à-vis the importance and necessity of women's participation in politics.
4. Akwa Ibom State government should establish a gender-neutral and equal platform for political involvement. More women should be appointed to government positions and partisan levels.

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