Perceived Political Marginalization and Political Trust as Predictors of Political Participation: The Moderating Role of Resilience among Nigerian Youths

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Abstract

The study explored the predictive roles of perceived political marginalization and political trust on political participation, with resilience as a potential moderator, among Nigerian youths. A total of 204 undergraduate students (98 males and 82 females), aged 18–30 years (M = 23.35, SD = 5.06), from Alex-Ekwueme Federal University, Ebonyi State, participated in the study using a survey design. Data were collected through standardized instruments: the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale, Political Trust Scale, Political Marginalization Scale, and Political Participation Scale. Multiple linear regression analysis revealed that political trust significantly predicted political participation ($\beta = .15$, $p < .001$), while political marginalization and resilience did not show significant predictive effects. Furthermore, resilience did not moderate the relationships between either political marginalization or political trust and political participation. Gender and age were significant predictors, with male gender negatively related and increasing age positively related to political participation. The findings suggest that trust in political institutions enhances civic engagement among young Nigerians, while resilience alone may not buffer the effects of political disenchantment. Implications for democratic governance and youth political inclusion in Nigeria are discussed.

Keywords: political marginalization, political trust, political participation, resilience, youth, Nigeria

Introduction

Political participation remains a cornerstone of democratic consolidation, yet its psychological foundations are unevenly understood, particularly in contexts marked by

historical grievances and institutional fragility. Political participation refers to citizens' voluntary involvement in selecting leaders, shaping policies, and influencing collective decisions (Adelekan, 2010; Akamare, 2023). Across democracies, participation is shaped not only by structural conditions but also by citizens' subjective experiences of inclusion, trust, and efficacy. This study advances an integrated psychological account by examining how perceived political marginalisation and political trust relate to political participation, and whether resilience conditions these relationships. Perceived political marginalisation refers to the felt experience of exclusion from meaningful political influence (Kagan & Burton, 2005; Mowat, 2015). Beyond material deprivation, marginalisationmarginalisation reflects a deeper psychosocial alienation; an impression of being pushed to the periphery of collective life (Anugwom, 2000; Ekpu, 2017). In Nigeria's ethnically plural federation, narratives of exclusion have persisted, particularly in the South-East, where historical memories and post-war politics have fueled perceptions of systemic disadvantage (Amuta, 2024; Chido, 2020; Ugochukwu, 2020). Such perceptions are not trivial; repeated experiences of exclusion may erode citizens' belief that political engagement yields meaningful returns, thereby dampening participation.

Political trust, which is citizens' evaluative orientation toward political institutions and actors (Hetherington, 1998; Wang, 2016), is widely recognised as essential for democratic governance (Allen, 2016; Berg, 2019). Trust legitimises authority and sustains cooperation, whereas distrust breeds cynicism and disengagement (Kumar et al., 2020). Globally, political trust has declined (Camaj, 2014; Ceron, 2015), and Nigeria is no exception. Endemic corruption and unmet campaign promises have weakened institutional credibility and national cohesion (Iroghama, 2012; Ogbeidi, 2012; Okafor et al., 2020). Contemporary controversies, including debates surrounding fuel subsidy reforms, further illustrate how opaque governance practices intensify public suspicion (Johnson, 2024). When citizens doubt the integrity of political actors, participation may appear futile or risky. However, political disengagement is not uniform. Some individuals remain civically active despite adversity. This variability invites attention to resilience, defined as adaptive flexibility in the face of stress (American Psychological Association). Research indicates that resilience is unevenly distributed and linked to educational and socio-economic resources (Zajacova et al., 2005; Kunzler et al., 2018). Individuals higher in resilience may sustain political motivation despite frustration (Ekpeyong, 2016; Evans, 2022). In this sense, resilience may function as a psychological buffer, mitigating the corrosive effects of marginalisation and distrust on participation.

Existing scholarship provides a robust yet fragmented foundation for understanding the interplay among political marginalisation, political trust, resilience, and political participation. Four major theoretical traditions, Polarities of Democracy Theory, Political Participation Theory, Relative Deprivation Theory, and Resilience Theory, offer complementary insights into the psychological and structural conditions shaping democratic engagement. Benet's

(2019) Polarities of Democracy Theory conceptualises democracy as a dynamic balancing of interdependent values such as participation and representation, freedom and authority, and diversity and equality. Drawing on Johnson's (1992) polarity management framework, Benet argues that enduring democratic tensions are not problems to be solved but polarities to be managed. This perspective is especially useful in contexts marked by perceived exclusion, where overemphasis on representation without meaningful participation may erode legitimacy. The Theory foregrounds political trust as a unifying mechanism that sustains cooperation across democratic poles. While normatively rich, it offers a limited micro-level explanation of why individuals facing marginalisation either disengage or persist in their participation. The Political Participation Theory (Verba & Nie, 1972) shifts attention to individual, social, and institutional determinants of engagement. Political efficacy, education, income, and civic networks are identified as central predictors of participation. In Nigeria, structural barriers (youth unemployment, weak institutions, and corruption) constrain civic engagement, reinforcing apathy (Adeyemi, 2019). This framework illuminates how institutional distrust and limited resources depress turnout and activism. However, it assumes relatively stable motivational resources and under-theorises how individuals cope psychologically with systemic frustration, leaving resilience largely unaddressed.

Relative Deprivation Theory deepens the analysis of marginalisation by linking perceived discrepancies between expectations and capabilities to political distrust and collective action (Dibie, 2000). Building on Davies and Gurr, the Theory posits that widening gaps between rising expectations and declining gratifications foster alienation, protest, or even violence. In Nigeria, claims of exclusion in the Niger Delta and South-East, including grievances over resource allocation and political representation, exemplify such dynamics (Nwaorgu, 2016; Omotola & Alumona, 2016). Empirical accounts associate marginalisation with separatist agitation, militancy, and insecurity (Awofeso, 2017; Idike, 2022). While the Theory explains politicised grievance and distrust, it tends to privilege collective unrest over quieter forms of political withdrawal, such as apathy, and does not sufficiently account for why some individuals remain constructively engaged despite deprivation. However, Hooghe and Marien (2012) found that political discontent or dissatisfaction does not necessarily lead to political withdrawal. Instead, individuals may remain civically and politically active even when they feel excluded or marginalised, particularly through non-institutional or expressive forms of participation. Their work challenges the assumption that negative political experiences automatically reduce engagement. Resilience Theory (Masten & Obradovic, 2006; Southwick et al., 2006) addresses this gap by conceptualising adaptation to adversity as a dynamic, multilevel process. Resilience is shaped by personal attitudes, supportive relationships, cultural resources, and institutional contexts (Ungar et al., 2005; Greene et al., 2015). Studies across trauma, poverty, and conflict settings demonstrate that individuals and communities can sustain hope and agency amid hardship (Pulla & Das, 2021). Nigerian-focused research highlights coping strategies ranging from problem-solving to social support (Iruloh & Elsie, 2012), yet these studies largely focus on socio-economic survival rather than political

behaviour. The political implications of resilience, particularly its capacity to buffer the effects of marginalisation and distrust on participation, remain insufficiently examined.

Research on the relationship between political trust and participation consistently shows that declining trust predicts voter apathy and disengagement (Turper, 2017; Zhelnina, 2019). Nigeria's low turnout and civic withdrawal reflect this broader trend (Ojetunde, 2019). However, extant studies seldom integrate trust, marginalisation, and resilience within a single explanatory model.

Drawing on political psychology and sociological perspectives, this study tests whether perceived political marginalisation and political trust predict political participation, and whether resilience directly predicts and moderates these relationships. By situating psychological processes within Nigeria's complex socio-political landscape (Nnoli, 2017; Nye, 2022; Omoju & Abraham, 2014; Otite, 1990;), the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how citizens navigate exclusion and uncertainty. Clarifying these dynamics is essential for strengthening democratic engagement in societies confronting persistent inequalities and fragile institutional trust.

From the foregoing, the following hypotheses were tested:

1. Political marginalisation will significantly predict Political participation

2. Political trust will significantly predict political participation

3. Resilience will significantly predict political participation

4. Resilience will significantly moderate the relationship between political marginalisation and political participation.

5. Resilience will significantly moderate the relationship between political trust and political participation.

Method

Participants
Two hundred and four (204) undergraduate students of Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ebonyi State (AE-FUNAI), participated in the study. The university was selected because it attracts students from diverse geopolitical zones of Nigeria, particularly the South-East, and includes youths who actively participated in the 2023 general elections. Participants comprised 98 males and 82 females, all Nigerian citizens aged between 18 and 30 years.

Instruments
Four standardised instruments were utilised: the 25-item Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-25; Connor & Davidson, 2003), Political Participation Scale (PPS; Okafor et al.,

2020), Political Trust Scale (PTS; adapted from Shockley-Zalabak et al., 1999), and Political Marginalisation Scale (PMS; adapted from (Duffy & Gensmer, 2019).

Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-25)
The CD-RISC-25 (Connor & Davidson, 2003) is a self-report measure originally developed within the PTSD clinical population. It exists in 2-, 10-, and 25-item versions and conceptualises resilience across five components: Personal Competence; Acceptance of Change and Secure Relationships; Trust/Tolerance/Strengthening Effects of Stress; Control; and Spiritual Influences. The 25-item version was adopted. In Nigeria, Ikelegbe (2015) contextualised the scale for social research, conceptualising resilience as the capacity to cope with socio-cultural and economic burdens arising from adverse political misrepresentation. Reported test–retest reliability coefficients include .92 (Amaechi, 2014) and .74 (Aderogba, 2014), indicating acceptable stability.

Political Participation Scale (PPS)
The PPS (Okafor et al., 2020) was adapted from the Job Involvement Scale (JIS). The original 18-item JIS used a five-point Likert scale ("strongly agree" to "strongly disagree") with scores ranging from 1 to 5. Ejiogu (2015) reported a split-half reliability of .76 in a Nigerian validation. For this study, three lecturers (two in Psychology, one in Political Science) assessed face and content validity. Wording modifications replaced "work/job" with "political activities" or "politics" in selected items; five items (2, 10, 11, 16, 18) were deleted, resulting in an 11-item scale. Test–retest reliability over a two-week interval with 60 students across six departments yielded a correlation coefficient of .65.

Political Trust Scale (PTS)
The PTS was adapted from the Organisational Trust Index (Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis, & Cessaria, 1999). The 18-item Likert scale ranges from "very little" to "very great." Sample items include: "Political leaders in my constituency follow through with what they say" and "I feel connected to political leaders in my constituency." The original instrument demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .97), with item-total correlations ranging from .42 to .83 (mean = .67), indicating strong reliability.

Political Marginalisation Scale (PMS)
The PMS was adapted from the three-item Lifetime Experiences of Marginalisation Scale (LEMS; Duffy & Gensmer, 2019). Minor contextual modifications inserted "political" before terms such as "experience," "interaction," and "settings." Sample items include: "Throughout my life, I have had many political experiences that have made me feel marginalised." The original scale reported Cronbach's α = .97, with item-total correlations ranging from .42 to .83 (mean = .67), indicating high internal consistency.

Procedure
Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. The researcher and assistants established rapport before lectures and during free periods, administered questionnaires, and collected them immediately after completion. Informed consent was obtained through signed agreement forms. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, participation was voluntary, data were used strictly for academic purposes, and no incentives were provided.

Design and Statistical Analysis

A cross-sectional survey design was employed to enable standardised data collection from a large sample within a limited timeframe. Multiple linear regression was conducted to estimate the predictive effect of three independent variables (political marginalisation, political trust, and resilience) on the dependent variable (political participation).

Results

Descriptive and Correlation Results

Table 1

Mean, standard deviation and inter-correlation among variables (n = 204)

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.Political Participation	11.15	8.41	-	-	-	-	-	-
2.PM	24.67	7.93	.10	-	-	-	-	
3.Political Trust	34.80	13.74	.28**	.01	-	-	-	
4.Resilience	16.35	17.26	.12	.29**	-.13	-	-	
5.Gender	1.53	.49	-.37**	-.09	.14*	.89	-	
6.Age	23.35	5.06	.26**	-.08	.11	.10	.11	-

*Note: SD = Standard Deviation, PM = Political Marginalization * < .05; ** <.001*

Political trust was positively correlated with political participation (r = .28, p < .01). Resilience was positively associated with marginalization (r = .29, p < .01), while gender and age also significantly correlated with participation (r = -.37 and .26 respectively).

Regression Analyses

Table 2.

Moderating Effect of Resilience in the relationship between Political Marginalization and Political Participation.

Model	B	SEB	t	p	95% CI		R²	F
Gender	-5.79	1.08	-5.34	.001	[-7.93;	-3.65]	.20	.01 (5,198)**
Age	.35	.10	3.27	.001	[.14;	.56]		
PM	.06	.07	.88	.378	[.07;	.20]		
Resilience (R)	.03	.03	.98	.325	[-.03;	.09]		
PM x R	-.00	.00	-.87	.385	[-.00;	.00]		

Note: B = Regression coefficient; SE = Standard Error; t = Population t value; p = Probability level; CI = Upper & Lower Confidence Interval, PM = Political Marginalization.

This regression model was significant, $F(5, 198) = .20$, $p < .001$, indicating that political marginalisation and resilience collectively explained 20% of the variance in political participation. However, examining individual predictors, political marginalisation did not significantly predict political participation ($\beta = 0.06$, $t = 0.88$, 95% CI [-0.07, 0.20], $p > .05$), and resilience also did not significantly predict political participation ($\beta = 0.03$, $t = 0.98$, 95% CI [-0.03, 0.09], $p > .05$). Additionally, resilience did not moderate the relationship between political marginalization and political participation, as the interaction term was non-significant ($\beta = -0.00$, $t = -0.87$, 95% CI [-0.00, 0.00], $p > .05$). In contrast, demographic predictors were significant: gender negatively predicted political participation ($B = -5.79$, $t = -5.34$, 95% CI [-7.93, -3.65], $p < .001$), while age positively predicted political participation ($B = 0.35$, $t = 3.27$, 95% CI [0.14, 0.56], $p < .001$).

Table 3.

Moderating Effect of Resilience on the Relationship Between Political Trust and Political Participation

Model	B	SEB	t	p	95% CI		R²	F
Gender	-5.25	1.04	-5.02	.001	[-7.73;	-3.19]	.26	.01 (5,198)**
Age	.30	.10	2.93	.001	[.10;	.50]		
PT	.15	.03	3.91	.001	[.07;	.22]		

Resilience (R)	.05	.03	1.96.	050	[-.00;	.11]
PT x R	-.00	.00	-1.93	.054	[-.00;	.00]

Note: B = Regression coefficient; SE = Standard Error; t = Population t value; p = Probability level; CI = Upper & Lower Confidence Interval, PT = Political Trust.

The regression model was significant, $F(5, 198) = 26.01$, $p < .001$, indicating that political trust and resilience collectively explained 26% of the variance in political participation. Political trust significantly and positively predicted political participation ($\beta = 0.15$, $t = 3.91$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.22], $p < .001$). Resilience showed a marginal positive effect on political participation ($B = 0.05$, $t = 1.96$, 95% CI [-0.00, 0.11], $p = .050$), though this effect is at the threshold of significance. Resilience did not moderate the relationship between political trust and political participation, as the interaction term was not significant ($\beta = -0.00$, $t = -1.93$, 95% CI [-0.00, 0.00], $p > .05$). Gender negatively predicted political participation ($\beta = -5.25$, $t = -5.02$, 95% CI [-7.73, -3.19], $p < .001$). In contrast, age positively predicted political participation ($\beta = 0.30$, $t = 2.93$, 95% CI [0.10, 0.50], $p < .001$).

Discussion

The present study examined the moderating role of resilience in the relationships between political marginalisation, political trust, and political participation among undergraduate students. The findings provide partial support for the hypothesised relationships and extend existing literature within the Nigerian socio-political context. Consistent with prior empirical and theoretical literature, political trust was positively associated with political participation. This finding aligns with the trust framework advanced by Shockley-Zalabak et al. (1999), who conceptualised trust as confidence in leadership competence, integrity, and reliability. When citizens perceive political actors as credible and dependable, they are more inclined to engage in civic and political processes. The present result also supports Okafor et al. (2020), who emphasised that psychological attachment and involvement in political processes are strengthened when individuals perceive institutions as responsive and accountable. In contexts where political distrust is prevalent, trust can serve as a motivational resource, encouraging constructive engagement rather than apathy or withdrawal. Thus, among the sampled undergraduates, trust in political leadership is a critical determinant of participatory behaviour.

Contrary to expectations, political marginalisation did not significantly predict political participation in the regression model. It aligns with Hooghe and Marien (2012), who found that individuals may remain civically active despite marginalisation. While marginalisation is often theorised to provoke either political withdrawal or mobilisation, this study found no direct effect. However, political marginalisation was positively related to resilience. This association aligns with the resilience framework of Connor and Davidson (2003), who conceptualised resilience as the capacity to adapt positively in the face of adversity. Experiences of political exclusion may stimulate adaptive coping mechanisms, strengthening

individuals' psychological endurance. Nevertheless, such resilience did not translate into higher political participation. Furthermore, resilience did not moderate the relationship between political marginalisation and political participation. This non-significant interaction suggests that resilience neither buffered nor amplified the effect of marginalisation on engagement. Although resilience reflects adaptability and perseverance (Connor & Davidson, 2003), political participation may depend more heavily on structural, institutional, and contextual variables than on individual coping capacity alone. Similarly, resilience did not significantly moderate the relationship between political trust and political participation, despite showing a marginal direct effect in the second regression model. While resilience may enhance general psychological functioning, its role in shaping civic behaviour appears limited within this sample.

Age also emerged as a significant positive predictor of political participation. Older students were more likely to participate in political activities than their younger counterparts. This finding is consistent with developmental and civic engagement perspectives, suggesting that political awareness, efficacy, and responsibility increase with age and exposure to sociopolitical experiences. As students advance in age and academic level, they may develop stronger political identities and clearer perceptions of how governance affects their lives, thereby enhancing their participation. Gender significantly predicted political participation, with a negative relationship observed. Although interpretation depends on coding direction, the result indicates meaningful gender differences in participation levels. This finding reflects broader socio-cultural patterns in Nigeria, where gender norms and structural inequalities have historically shaped political engagement. Interestingly, gender was positively associated with political trust, suggesting that perceptions of political institutions may differ across gender groups. Such differences partly explain variations in political engagement and warrant further investigation.

Overall, the findings suggest that political trust and demographic factors (age and gender) are more salient predictors of political participation than political marginalisation and resilience. The results reinforce the importance of institutional credibility and socio-demographic dynamics in understanding youth political engagement. Within the Nigerian university context, fostering trust in political systems may be more instrumental in promoting participation than focusing exclusively on individual psychological traits.

Limitations and Future Directions
This study relied on convenience sampling of university students, limiting generalizability. Future research should include broader demographic samples and explore longitudinal dynamics. Additionally, examining civic identity and political efficacy may offer deeper insights.

Conclusion
This study contributes to the growing literature on political psychology by examining psychological and socio-demographic predictors of political participation in a Nigerian university setting. Political trust emerged as a significant positive predictor of political participation, while resilience showed limited direct influence and no moderating effect. Political marginalisation did not predict participation when other variables were controlled.

Gender and age consistently influenced participation outcomes. The findings suggest that fostering institutional trust may be more effective in promoting youth political engagement than focusing solely on individual coping capacities. Political participation among young adults is shaped more by perceptions of system credibility and socio-demographic realities than by resilience alone.

Recommendations
1. **Enhancing Political Trust:** Policymakers and political leaders should prioritise transparency, accountability, and consistent communication to build trust among youths.
2. **Civic Education Programs:** Universities should integrate civic engagement initiatives that strengthen political awareness and efficacy, particularly targeting younger students.
3. **Gender-Inclusive Political Platforms:** Interventions to reduce gender disparities in political engagement should address structural barriers and promote inclusive participation.
4. **Further Research:** Future studies should explore additional moderating variables, such as political efficacy, socio-economic status, and media exposure, to better understand the dynamics of youth political participation. Longitudinal designs also clarify causal relationships.

In sum, strengthening institutional trust and addressing demographic disparities may provide more sustainable pathways to enhancing political participation among Nigerian youths.

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