



## **Students' Attitudes Towards Political Participation and Democratic Values in Nigeria: Critical Democracy Education Implications**

Adaobiagu N. Obiagu, Celestina U. Machie and Nneka F. Ndubuisi

### ***Abstract***

This study investigated the attitudes of university students toward political participation, as well as four other selected democratic values – freedom and liberty, human rights/human rights protest, corruption resistance, and separation of powers in Nigeria. A descriptive survey design, with a tool entitled '*Attitude towards Democratic Values Questionnaire (ADVQ)*', was used to collect data from randomly selected 250 undergraduate students (male = 120; female = 130) from a university in Nigeria. Six research questions were answered using descriptive statistics in guiding the study. The results showed that university students reported an unwillingness to protest human rights violations as well as the tendency to accept bribes and campaign for a wrong political candidate for financial gains, despite general findings that indicated positive attitudes towards all selected democratic values among university students. The result of the variance analysis conducted to ascertain the influence of gender on attitudes towards democratic values showed that female students scored significantly higher than their male counterparts in all measured democratic principles, excepting human rights and separation of powers. Implications of findings for a critical democratic education that emphasises critical consciousness, spatial voting, and socio-political resilience are discussed.

**Keywords:** human rights, political participation, democratic values, separation of powers, democracy education

**Adaobiagu Obiagu** is an educator and a lawyer. She is a lecturer in the Department of Social Science Education at the University of Nigeria. She teaches and researches pedagogy and themes of gender, citizenship, human rights and peace education mainly from critical, decolonial, and transformative perspectives. She has authored and co-authored papers in these research areas, including the following: (1) Ajaps, S.O., & Obiagu, A.N. (2021). Increasing civic engagement through civic education: A critical consciousness perspective. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 4(1), 64 – 87. <https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2020.2> (2) Obiagu, A., & Nwaubani, O. (2020). The challenges of teaching for human rights in Nigeria: Knowledge, pedagogy and activism. *Human Rights Education Review*, 3(2), 5 – 26, <http://doi.org/10.7577/hrer.3804>; (3) Obiagu, A.N., Mezieobi, D.N., Aroh, N.P., & Akubue, F.N. (2020). The effect of cooperative concept mapping on misconceptions, knowledge achievement and transfer of learning in peace education. *The Social Studies*, 111(1), 18 – 38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2019.1652139>

**Celestina Machie** graduated with a bachelor's degree in Social Studies Education from the Department of Social Science Education at the University of Nigeria. Her research interests include social studies education, youth and youth development.

**Nneka Ndubuisi** graduated with a bachelor's degree in Social Studies Education from the Department of Social Science Education at the University of Nigeria. Her research interest includes social studies education and well-being.

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## Introduction

Democracy is a system of governance that guarantees representative government, power to the people, fundamental rights, participatory engagement, checks and balances, impartiality administration, and equality (IDEA, 2021c). The presence of democracy in a given State can be measured by the State's practice of democratic values – the fundamental beliefs and constitutional principles which guide the practices of a democratic government—such as justice and equality, freedom and liberty, rule of law, separation of powers, and respect of human rights. Current observations show that democracy is facing challenges in recent times; there is increasing reports of democratic recession and backsliding across advanced and developing countries (Diamond, 2015; IDEA, 2021c; VonDoepp, 2019). In Nigeria, democracy, although it has not been well practiced since its adoption, has receded to the barest minimum, with Nigeria described as a hybrid regime with a score of 4.11 and rank of 107 in the 2021 Democracy Index (Economist Intelligence, 2021). “Nigeria’s democracy suffers many issues such as violations of human rights, poor attitude to work, extortion and bribery, corruption, and varying conflicts” (Obiagu, 2019, p. 5), and abuse of separation of powers, with rife electoral violence/malpractices. The seeming silence of the citizens on these democratic issues that hamper the enjoyment of the advantages of democracy (i.e., economic development, human development, peace, and security) is more troubling (Gerring et al., 2012; Halperin et al., 2004).

Due to the importance of democracy to development, efforts ranging from the adoption of governance transparency policies to electoral reforms, economic empowerment and increasing citizens’ engagement in civic activities are pursued to improve the practice of democratic values. Of particular concern to this paper are educational efforts towards improving citizens’ democratic behaviours. These efforts range from formal to informal citizenship, voter, or human rights education programmes and awareness campaigns. National Orientation Agency (2006) emphasised the need to use civic education to promote youths’ active participation in meeting with political officials to express their concerns and desires, petitioning and demonstrating peacefully, voting, registration, contesting elective offices, demanding accountability from elected representatives, scrutinising and criticising government policies, writing articles in newspapers, boycotts and labour union strikes so as to solve political problems in Nigeria. With this objective, civic education was reintroduced in curricula in 2008 to empower students with democratic and other values (NERDC, 2008). These values include freedom of speech, free and fair elections, right to vote and be voted for, equality, electoral credibility (citizens’ vote must count), justice, rule of law, national integration (unity in diversity), transparency, patriotism, self-reliance, dignity of human, supremacy of constitution, toleration of opposition and legitimacy (NERDC, 2018).

Despite the implementation of democratic values through school subjects such as civic education and government, democratic problems (e.g., human rights violation, electoral violence and malpractice, suppression of freedom of speech, ethnic discord, kidnapping/killing of political opponents, and writing or sponsoring the publications of damaging articles in the media) are rife in Nigeria. The youths who undertook civic education are employed for human rights violations and democracy disruption. These issues could be connected to the poor implementation of democratic contents and the dominance of rote learning in both pre-higher and university education. To impact citizens’ democratic behaviours and effectively solve Nigeria’s democracy issues through the teaching of democratic values in schools, the attitudes of citizens toward democratic values need to be as-

certained. This is because attitude plays a key role in predicting or producing behaviour. Allport (1935) defined attitude as a “mental and neural state of readiness” (p. 798). Ascertaining students’ attitude towards democratic values will answer whether students are ready to apply the learnt democratic principles to practice, and also inform the transformation of democracy education.

There are inconsistencies with results of studies that have explored the issues of actual political participation and human rights activism, and attitude towards human rights, freedom, and corruption (Cohrs et al., 2007; Fadairo & Ladele, 2014; Obiagu & Ajaps, 2022; Lewis & Bratton, 2000). Therefore, this study sought to add to this literature by investigating the attitude of youths towards selected democratic values – political participation, freedom and liberty, human rights respect and protection, resistance of corruption, and separation of powers. A focus on these principles is informed by their endangerment by increasing socio-political problems like abuse of judicial independence, victim blaming, and a high rate of corruption. Findings could provide insights into citizens’ poor democratic behaviours despite learning about democracy in schools, and hence, inform better strategies for rethinking and implementing democracy education. The study draws on the responses of 250 (female = 130; male = 120) undergraduate students of a university in Enugu state, Nigeria to attain its goals. A focus on this group is motivated by the important roles the youths play in a democracy.

### ***Literature on Selected Democratic Values in Nigeria***

Previous studies on each democratic value explored in this paper are reviewed below.

#### ***Political Participation in Nigeria***

Political participation involves engaging in political activities, such as voting in elections or referendums, petitioning, boycotts, mass protests and political rallies. It serves as a tool that the citizenry uses to influence governmental structure, policies, and decisions as well as hold their government accountable (Obiagu & Ajaps, 2022). Previous studies found that political participation is low in Nigeria (Adetoro & Omiyefa, 2017; Obiagu & Ajaps, 2022). Nigeria’s voting data from the year 1979 to 2019 made available by IDEA (2021a), for example, indicate that voter turnout declines annually to the tune of 5% to 10%, with the number of registered voters being around 50% of the number of voting age population. The number of total votes cast being about three to four times less than the number of registered voters. Material gains also drive political participation in Nigeria, making vote selling and buying a significant problem in Nigeria’s political landscape. Electoral violence is very high in Nigeria and mostly perpetrated by the youths mobilised by politicians as thugs. Gender influences political participation in Nigeria; women are consistently found to participate less in politics either as voters or leaders (Agbalajobi, 2010; Obiagu & Ajaps, 2022). As reported by the International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2021b), Nigerian women are not adequately represented in the political space. Patriarchal culture and stereotypical media are strong factors in women’s low engagement in politics; female politicians are criticised and scrutinised than male politicians and discussions about female

politicians are gendered and sensationalised (Eshiet, 2013; IDEA, 2021b). Evidently, while much is known about actual political participation, little is known about attitudes towards political participation. To effectively tackle the problem of political apathy among the citizens and promote increased political participation, we need to first understand people's attitudes towards political participation. This paper fills this gap by focusing on the attitude of university youths towards political participation.

### *Freedom and Liberty in Nigeria*

Freedom and liberty are core democratic values. It is an ideal of democracy that people be entitled to their freedom and not subjected to any form of restrictions, enslavement or deprivation except in accordance with the law. The principle of freedom and liberty guarantees the right to freedoms of expression, conscience, association, and movement. This democratic value is protected in the Nigerian Constitution which provides for the right to personal liberty in section 35(1) and freedom of expression of the people in section 39 (1). A study on Nigerian's attitude towards freedom show that the majority of Nigerians support freedom of expression (Lewis & Bratton, 2000). The support notwithstanding, a reasonable number of the study participants reported that they would not take action where such freedoms are deprived (Lewis & Bratton, 2000). Despite the recognition of these democratic values in Nigeria's constitution and Nigerian's endorsement of the values, the enjoyment of freedoms is low in the country. Government institutions from time to time infringe on the freedom and liberty of the press, particularly journalists and activists (United States Department of State, 2019). Afrobarometer's study on the status of freedom in Africa showed that Africans' perceived freedom of expression in a 2016/2018 survey declined by 7% from their perception in the previous 2011/2013 survey and that they are less confident about their freedom to engage in political speech as they exercise great caution in their political speeches (Logan & Penar, 2019). On interpersonal levels, predators engage in restricting and violating the freedom and liberty of others through kidnapping or controlling, with youths mostly used for these predatory purposes. Hence, this study sought to understand Nigerian youths' attitude towards freedom and liberty.

### *Human Rights Protection in Nigeria*

"Human rights are basic human entitlements founded on the dignity of human persons and the inherent human right to life and claims or freedoms –not necessarily covered in the extant laws of a state– which do not infringe on another's right or national or global security, broadly defined" (Obiagu & Nwaubani, 2020, p. 6). Nigeria is a signatory to many human rights conventions and it enshrined human rights in chapter 4 of its constitution. These rights include right to life, rights to freedom of movement, expression, conscience, religion, and association, rights to non-discrimination on grounds of race, religion, political affiliation, sex, or ethnicity, right to privacy, and right to privacy. In spite of these, human rights violations are high in Nigeria and appearing worse with each day that passes (Amnesty International, 2021); with significant human rights issues, unlawful and arbitrary killings, unlawful infringement on citizens' privacy rights, and criminal libel (United States Department of State, 2019; Amnesty International, 2021). Why is human rights violations increasing despite

educational efforts at empowering citizens to fight it and protect human rights? An answer to this can be deduced from the attitude of Nigerians towards human rights protection and respect. This has not been much investigated. Research on people's attitude towards human rights have been conducted in some other contexts (see Crowson, 2004; Cohrs et al., 2007). Cohrs et al. (2007), for instance, found that human rights endorsement predicts human rights behaviour and having universalist values positively predicts endorsement of human rights. Right-wing authoritarian beliefs negatively predicts endorsement of human rights. Nigerians, in this context, report an unwillingness to challenge the infringement of their right (Lewis & Bratton, 2000; Logan & Penar, 2019). The present study extends previous research by focusing on university students who have received civic education and as such, are expected to have better attitudes towards human rights and its protection.

### *Corruption Resistance in Nigeria*

Corruption is generally conceptualised as the use of public office for private gain. It has multiple negative effects on human rights, peace and development, and hampers the growth of democracy and economic development (Obiagu & Ossai, 2020). Corruption is increasing in Nigeria and Nigeria's score in corruption perception index consecutively failed from 2018 to 2021 with the country ranking 144, 146, 149 and 154 in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively (Transparency International, 2021a). Resisting corruption can be said to be an important democratic value in Africa since corruption undermines accountability and transparency in governance and leads governments to crack down on independent voices calling out abuses of power (Transparency International, 2021b). Studies have shown that corruption is euphemised in Nigeria (Ojo et al., 2020; Obiagu & Ossai, 2020) and this could result in actions against corrupt practices not being taken seriously by the citizens. A study by Fadairo & Ladele (2014) revealed that 50% to 89% of respondents of the study showed favourable attitude to different kinds of corrupt practices. Adesina & Oluyemo (2012) conducted a study on the views of youths about corruption in Nigeria and found that over 57% of the surveyed youths disclosed that they would embezzle public fund before carrying out any development project. Yet the dream of Nigerians is to see corruption end. Our study extended previous studies by focusing on attitude of youths towards corruption resistance.

### *Separation of Powers in Nigeria*

Separation of powers is a democratic doctrine that "highlights the roles to be played by the respective bodies (executive, legislative and judiciary) involved in the triangular equation and how to play them" (Mrabure & Awhefeada, 2020). The doctrine originated in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC when Aristotle (1998) and other philosophers such as John Locke through their writings championed the separation of powers between three arms of the government. The separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary are crucial in ensuring compliance with the democratic principle of rule of law (Mrabure & Awhefeada, 2020). The principle promotes the idea of checks and balances necessary to prevent dictatorship and arbitrariness. The principle of separation of powers is highly abused in Nigeria in different levels of governance. There is no significant checks and balances of powers between the executive and legislative arms at the local levels (Ugwuanyi et al., 2015). The powers of the

judicial arm of government is usually abused by the executive arm in Nigeria (Mrabure & Awhefeada, 2020). Yet much protest has not been witnessed in Nigeria against the abuse of separation of powers in Nigeria. A Nigerian study showed that more participants chose not to take action if the powers of the judiciary is infringed on by the executive (Lewis & Bratton, 2000). It is important to understand how youths perceive this principle of democracy. The understanding might inform practices that will promote the respect of separation of powers in Nigeria.

### ***Research Questions***

Specifically, the following research questions were answered by this study.

1. What is the attitude of Nigerian youths towards political participation?
2. What is the attitude of youths towards freedom and liberty?
3. How do youths feel about human rights respect and protection?
4. What is the attitude of youths towards political participation?
5. What are the attitudes of youths to the practice of separation of power?
6. Does gender influence the attitude of youths towards democratic values?

### ***Methods***

Adopting a descriptive survey design, this study used a questionnaire entitled ‘Attitude towards Democratic Values Questionnaire (ADVQ)’ to collect data on Nigerian youths’ attitudes towards selected democratic values (freedom and right to liberty, human rights respect and protection, corruption resistance, political participation, and respect for the separation of power). The method suits the objective of this study to ascertain the attitude of university students towards selected democratic values. The study was conducted in the Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria and the sample comprised 250 undergraduate students (male = 120; female = 130) conveniently and randomly sampled from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka to participate in the study. Beyond receiving components of democracy education at the university level, these students completed civic education lessons in their secondary education.

The instrument, ADVQ was developed by the authors. It was comprised of two sections. Section A requested information on participants’ biodata (gender). Section B had 5 clusters comprised of 33 items – 8 items in Cluster 1 (attitude towards freedom and right to liberty), 7 items in Cluster 2 (attitude towards respect and protection for human rights), 6 items in Cluster 3 (attitude towards corruption resistance), 6 items in Cluster 4 (attitude towards political participation), and 6 items in Cluster 5 (attitude towards respect for separation of power). All items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). The questionnaire items were drawn from reports in existing literature and researchers’ experience on democratic values in Nigeria. The suitability and language clarity of the items in the instrument (i.e., face validity) were ascertained by three University of Nigeria lecturers: two lecturers who are vastly knowledgeable in political studies and one

lecturer knowledgeable in measurement and evaluation. Pilot tests were run with 30 students from a faculty exempted from the study. The reliability tests on their responses were analysed with Cronbach Alpha. The pilot test yielded alpha coefficients of .78 which indicate a high level of internal consistency of the scale's item (Field, 2013). The instrument was adopted for the study.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

The second and third authors administered the questionnaire on undergraduate students who formally consented to participate in the study. A total of 270 questionnaires were distributed with 250 returned, constituting a 91.9% response rate. Participants completed the measure on the spot and the researchers collected the completed measures. A further reliability analysis was run on the collected study's data and the result yielded an alpha of .90 which indicate a very high level of internal consistency of the scale's item (Field, 2013). Frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviations analyses were computed on the data for answering research questions while the research hypothesis was analysed with t-test. Preliminary analyses were conducted to determine the study's data satisfaction of assumptions of normality, test of equality of error variance, and homogeneity of variance.

### ***Findings***

The mean results were scored on a range of 1 to 4. A score below 2.5 indicates a poor or negative attitude towards the measured democratic values while a score of 2.5 and above indicates a positive attitude towards measured democratic values (Krosnick & Presser, 2010). This mean range is adopted as the boundary between 'what is' and 'what is not' in studies using a 4-point Likert scale: In this study, it is adopted as the boundary between positive and negative democratic attitudes.

**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation [SD] of Responses on Subscales (n = 250)**

Measured Variables		Mean	SD
<i>Democratic Values Attitude (DVA)</i>	Right to Freedom and Liberty	3.05	.49
	Human Rights Respect & Protection	2.64	.24
	Corruption Resistance	2.63	.54
	Political Participation	2.52	.21
	Separation of Power	2.53	.23
	<i>Total [DVA]</i>	2.67	.17



Overall, the result of the mean and standard deviation analyses of participants' responses on the 33 items of the ADVQ (see Table 1) showed that university students have a generally positive attitude towards democratic values. All subscales and the overall measurement scale received a mean score above 2.5. Of these, only one subscale (right to freedom and liberty) received a mean score much above 2.5. Students reported a mean score slightly above the 2.5 benchmark on human rights protection, corruption resistance, political participation, and separation of power factors.

**Table 2: t-test Analysis in the Mean Responses of Male and Female University Students on each Measured Independent Variable (n = 250)**

Measured Variables	Male		Female		t-cal	Df	Sig**	Decision
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Freedom and Liberty	2.97	.49	3.11	.48	-2.20	248	.028	Reject
Human Rights	2.68	.26	2.61	.21	2.31	229*	.022	Reject
Corruption Resistance	2.48	.39	2.76	.62	-4.32	219*	.000	Reject
Political Participation	2.44	.20	2.58	.19	-5.45	248	.000	Reject
Separation of Power	2.58	.21	2.46	.23	4.16	248	.000	Reject
Overall Democratic Attitude	2.64	.14	2.71	.19	-3.45	238*	.001	Reject

Note: \* = Equal variance not assumed; \*\* = (2-tailed)

Gender has an influence on attitudes towards democratic values as shown in Table 2 with women reporting a significantly higher positive attitude towards overall democratic values. Male students are more likely to endorse human rights and separation of power than the female students, while female students are more likely to endorse freedom and liberty, resistance of corruption and political participation. Results of percentage, mean, standard deviation and t-test analyses conducted on specific measured democratic values (freedom and liberty, human rights protection, corruption resistance, political participation, and separation of power) are presented in subheadings below. Worthy of note is that the asterisked items indicate undesirable or negative attitude and thus are reversed scored, after conducting frequency analyses on participants' responses to the items, to get the true total attitude mean scores.

***Differences in Attitude of University Students Towards Rights to Freedom and Liberty***

The data in Table 3 show the mean score of respondents' attitudes towards rights to freedom and liberty while the data in Table 2 additionally reports on gender mean difference.

**Table 3: Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation for Youths Attitude towards Rights to Freedom and Liberty (N = 250)**

My attitude towards right to freedom and liberty is that:	Percentage (%)				M	SD
	SA	A	D	SD		
1. I like speaking my mind in all issues relating to human right abuse.	10	86.8	.0	3.2	3.04	.48
2. I like expressing my views in any democratic gathering	8.8	80	.0	11.2	2.86	.72
3. I believe that we have come to a time when freedom of speech can no longer be tolerated.*	3.6	30.4	15.2	50.8	3.13	.97
4. I do not like situation where human rights are abused.	30.4	27.6	.0	42.0	2.88	.85
5. I like a situation where people's wealth make them to be respected more than others.*	5.6	30.4	15.6	48.4	3.07	1.01
6. I believe that enjoyment of right to liberty should be dependent on socioeconomic status of someone.*	5.6	18.0	8.8	67.6	3.38	.97
7. I believe that socioeconomic status of an individual should not be a factor in enjoyment of liberty.	35.2	64.8	.0	.0	3.35	.48
8. I believe that men should enjoy more freedom and liberty than women.*	3.6	53.6	15.2	27.6	2.67	.92
<b>Grand Total</b>					<b>3.05</b>	<b>.49</b>

Results show a generally positive attitude towards rights, freedom, and liberty with female students providing greater endorsement for freedom and liberty. For item 8, more than 50% of the participants agree with the statement that men should enjoy more freedom and liberty than women. As shown in Table 2, a significant difference exists in the mean freedom and liberty attitude scores of female and male students to the favour of female students.

***Differences in Attitude of University Students Towards Human Rights Respect and Protection***

The data in Table 4 shows that university students generally have a positive attitude towards human rights protection while data in Table 2 found that attitude towards human rights protection to be significantly influenced by gender with men showing a higher positive attitude towards human rights.

**Table 4: Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation for Youths Attitude towards Human Rights (N = 250)**

My attitude towards human rights is that:	Percentage (%)				M	SD
	SA	A	D	SD		
9. I hate to say anything even if my right is violated, because I do not want to get myself arrested.*	3.6	51.2	15.2	30.0	2.72	.94
10. I like to protest when my right is violated. Even if there is no one to attend to my request.	3.2	59.2	15.2	22.4	2.43	.87
11. I do not like to protest when my right is violated because no one will listen to me.*	36.4	40.4	0	23.2	2.10	1.13
12. I will never engage in any protest even when it is going to help me because am scared of being killed.*	8.0	71.2	0	20.8	2.34	.89
13. I do not care to know about the human rights enshrined in the Nigerian constitution.*	5.6	37.2	15.6	41.6	2.93	1.01
14. I am passionate about protecting freedom of religion.	3.2	60.8	15.2	20.8	2.46	.86
15. I like a situation where right to life is respected.	52.4	47.6	0	0	3.52	.50
<b>Grand Total</b>					<b>2.64</b>	<b>.24</b>

A close observation of specific items show that youths have negative attitudes towards items promoting human rights protests. This indicates that while youths have positive attitudes towards human rights protection, they are unwilling to engage in protest for human rights protection or against human rights violations.

#### *Differences in Attitude of University Students Towards Corruption Resistance*

Results in Table 5 shows that university students have a moderately positive attitude towards corruption resistance; a democratic value. The data in Table 2 shows a statistically significant difference in the mean response scores of female and male students with female students showing greater positive attitudes towards corruption resistance and male students reporting less likelihood of resisting corruption.

**Table 5: Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation for Youths' Attitude towards Corruption Resistance (N = 250)**

My attitude towards corruption resistance is that:	Percentage (%)				M	SD
	SA	A	D	SD		
16. I believe that engaging in corruption is inevitable.*	2.8	48.4	15.2	33.6	2.80	.95
17. I can accept money or kind gestures to vote someone into a leadership position.*	7.2	68.0	4.0	20.8	2.38	.89

18. I do not see anything wrong with buying a civil servant, who is rendering one services gifts or giving the person money to motivate him or her to do more.*	6.8	66.0	4.0	23.2	2.44	.92
19. I do not like individuals who refuse to oblige workers requesting for money or goods from them.*	3.2	58.4	15.2	23.2	2.58	.88
20. I see people who refuse to give gratifications or gifts to workers as oversabi.*	3.6	51.2	15.2	30.0	2.72	.94
21. I dislike people using their public office for private gains.	36.4	39.6	0	24.0	2.88	1.15
<b>Grand Total</b>					<b>2.63</b>	<b>.54</b>

Reference to specific items especially the reversed scored negative items shows that university students, even though dislike the misuse of public office for private gains, can accept bribe and be influenced by bribes in their official capacity.

### *Differences in Attitude of University Students Towards Political Participation*

The data in Table 6 showed that youths have a positive attitude towards political participation. A mean comparison (see Table 2) shows that female students have a positive attitude towards political participation while male students have a negative attitude towards political participation. A t-test analysis shows that the mean difference was statistically significant.

**Table 6: Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation for Youths' Attitude towards Political Participation (N = 250)**

My attitude towards political participation is that:	Percentage (%)				M	SD
	SA	A	D	SD		
22. I like voting in elections	35.2	45.6	.4	18.8	2.97	1.05
23. I will never allow myself to be used as thugs to disrupt an election.	36.4	39.6	0	24.0	2.88	1.15
24. I like campaigning for people that offer me money even if they are not the right candidate.*	2.8	62.4	15.2	19.6	2.52	.84
25. I don't like voting during elections because my vote doesn't count.*	35.2	45.6	.4	18.8	2.03	1.05
26. I hate participating in politics because it doesn't contribute anything to my life.*	38.4	45.6	.4	15.6	1.93	1.01
27. I like voting for the most qualified and responsible candidates during election, even if he/she doesn't share gifts.	7.2	76.4	4.0	12.4	2.78	.75
<b>Grand Total</b>					<b>2.52</b>	<b>.21</b>

Analysis of the specific items showed that university youths liked voting in elections and a resolution not to act as thugs that disrupt elections. Further analysis of item 25, when the SD score is considered, showed that the perception that votes do not count can serve to dissuade many youths from voting in an election and participating in politics. As seen in item 24, youths reported their likelihood of campaigning for wrong political aspirants if there will be monetary gain in doing the campaign.

### *Differences in Attitude of University Students Towards Separation of Power*

Result in Table 7 showed a positive attitude towards separation of power, an attribute of democracy. A mean comparison of the data in Table 2 showed that female university students have a negative attitude towards separation of power while male university students have positive attitudes towards the principle of separation of power. A t-test analysis indicated the difference to be statistically significant with male university students reporting better positive attitude towards the principle of separation of power.

**Table 7: Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation for Youths Attitude towards Separation of Power (N = 250)**

My attitude towards separation of power is that:	Percentage (%)				M	SD
	SA	A	D	SD		
28. I like the practice of checks and balances in Nigerian democracy.	32.0	67.2	.8	0	3.31	.48
29. I believe that tyranny and dictatorship are reduced with the help of checks and balances.	8.0	71.2	0	20.8	2.66	.89
30. I strongly believe that there is need for the legislature, executive and judiciary to respect and maintain independence of another.	2.4	60.0	15.2	22.4	2.42	.86
31. I will always join the society to fight against tyrant leaders in Nigeria, that is using democracy to carry out their evil plots.	9.6	64.8	13.2	12.4	2.72	.80
32. It is wise for the president to take action without legislative or judicial approval in non-emergency cases.*	10.4	68.8	0	20.8	2.31	.92
33. I like when the president enforces actions without the required judicial approval if the judiciary is slow to reach decision.*	34.8	61.6	0	3.6	1.72	.64
<b>Grand Total</b>					<b>2.53</b>	<b>.23</b>

An analysis of specific items indicated that university youths believe that tyranny and dictatorship are reduced with the help of checks and balances and are also willing to fight against tyrant leaders in Nigeria. Responses to item 30 and the negatively worded reversed coded items 32 and 33 show a low endorsement of the principle of separation of power by the study participants indicating university students' objection to the independence of each arm of the government and checks and balances.

## *Discussion*

This paper investigated the attitude of university students towards selected democratic values (political participation, human rights protection, freedom and liberty, corruption resistance and separation of powers) in Nigeria. Generally, the results showed positive attitudes towards the values. Political participation and separation of powers received the lowest scores.

Specifically, the finding indicates that female university students have positive attitude towards political participation while male students have negative attitude towards political participation. It is surprising that the females, who are found to participate less in politics (Agbalajobi, 2010; Obiagu & Ajaps, 2022), reported a more positive attitude towards political participations than their male counterparts mostly found to be more active in politics. This contradiction could be explained by structural factors such as patriarchy that limits women's agency and participation the public arena. Participants further reported liking to vote but hold a disturbing belief that their votes do not count. This held perception that their votes do not count can serve to dissuade many youths from voting in an election and participating in politics. It could be the perception behind the low turnout of voters during elections in Nigeria (IDEA, 2021a) especially in present years when voters' education is implemented through civic education curriculum. The finding of the likelihood of youths campaigning for wrong political aspirants upon receiving a monetary gain is particularly disturbing and points to a lack of critical political thinking among youths.

Freedom and liberty are the most endorsed democratic values by university students in this study. This finding compares with the findings of previous studies (Logan & Penar, 2019). The finding that more than 50% of the participants agree with the statement that men should enjoy more freedom and liberty than women can be explained by the patriarchal culture of Nigeria that has not been disrupted by the already existing civic education in Nigeria. The significant difference found in the mean freedom and liberty attitude scores of female and male students to the favour of female students indicates Nigerian females' desire to enjoy equal freedom and liberty as the men.

The findings of the study that university students endorsed human rights compares with previous findings (Logan & Penar, 2019). Our study finds that even though university students report positive attitude towards human rights, they reported negative attitude towards engaging in protests for human rights protection or against human rights violations, including when their own rights are involved, due to their fear of being further violated. This is similar to Lewis and Bratton (2000) finding that many Nigerians reported unwillingness to protest a violation of their liberties by the government. The disruptive nature of protesting in

Nigeria as noted by Obiagu & Ajaps (2022) explains this mismatch between youths' endorsement of human rights values and willingness to engage in protests to enforce the rights. This suggests that fighting human rights violations takes more than educating about human rights.

Whereas the study participants reported a generally low positive attitude towards corruption resistance, attention to specific items raised some important concerns. A focus on specific items revealed that youths could be resisting corruption to a very low extent; they reported a favourable attitude towards bribery and vote-selling. The finding of favourable attitudes towards bribery compares with the findings of previous studies (Fadairo & Ladele, 2014; Adesina & Oluyemo, 2012). This finding could be explained by the systemic nature of corruption in Nigeria that suggests corruption as a culture.

The low endorsement of the principle of separation of power among the respondents could be explained by the red tape that affects the enforcement of checks and balances and delays in the prosecution of corrupt and nepotic public officials. Probably, they perceive the procedures involved in checks and balances as cumbersome and standing in the way of quick justice. Yet the neglect of the procedures fuels dictatorship and worsens citizens' rights to freedoms and liberties. This attitude towards separation of powers could explain Nigerians unwillingness to protest the infringement of judicial power by the executive (Lewis & Bratton, 2000). This lack of unwillingness was evident in the recent abuse of judicial powers and separation of powers by the president of Nigeria (Mrabure & Awhefeada, 2020) which went unprotested. Arguably, students are not able to act out their positive democratic attitudes because they are not empowered by their education to enact the values. Teacher education programmes fail to prepare teachers to teach for democracy (Ari et al., 2021; Obiagu, 2019).

### ***Implications for Spatial Voting and Critical Democracy Education***

This study is limited by the use of the self-reporting questionnaire for data collection since participants' responses may be biased. This limitation notwithstanding, the findings of the study are important. Findings suggest implications for *critical democracy education* that aims to promote critical consciousness and positive attitudes toward democracy, elections and voting, separation of powers, corruption resistance and participation in human rights protection and actions against rights violations. It invites educators to empower students to question their attitudes toward democratic values and reflect on their fears and unwillingness to enact their held values as well as the structures or factors contributing to their reluctance to democratically engage. Critical democracy education further challenges students to overcome their fears, resist hegemonic structures, and democratically engage.

Importantly, critical democracy education pursued through civic education should empower students with spatial voting skills and sociopolitical resilience. It should pay attention to political campaign and voting motivations revealed in this study. Topics on elections and voting should draw materials from various voter education tools –voter guide, party endorsement, and spatial map (for discussion on these tools see Boudreau et al., 2018)– to enrich education for democracy. Voter education tools contain election matters like political ideologies, processes and stages of election, requirements for contesting and voting in elections, and the duties, functions and rights of the electorates and electoral officers; with some visual instructional materials such as voter card, voters register at federal, state, local

government, and ward levels, polling booths, voter board for display of voter register for claims and objections by registered voters, voter rolls, electoral officials, and independent election observers. It is important to use voter education tools in civic classes because they enhance *spatial voting* (i.e., voting for a political candidate on the ground that he or she holds ideological views that are similar to that of the independent voter – not that of the voter's boss) (Boudreau et al., 2018). Spatial voting is necessary in a democratic governance process.

*Spatial voting education* is cogent in Nigeria to eradicate ignorance and unconscious slavery among many Nigerians who vote along (a) sentiments, (b) important other's endorsement without assessment/verifications of the endorsed candidate's claims, (c) monetary gains, or (d) their hegemonic godfathers' personal interests as against informed (independent) interest in collective good will and democratic principles. Using voter education handbooks and other voter education tools could bring learners closer to the realities of elections in their localities; thereby make the topic less theoretical and foreign to students. Classroom practices of organising elections for prefectship positions and engaging students in decision-making processes (Morapedi & Jotia, 2011; Oluniyi, 2011) can prepare students for effective voting behaviours and appreciation of the principles of separation of powers. As noted by Sanjaya et al. (2022), civic education students should be exposed to stimulating problem solving thoughts and empowering them to take actions related to problem solving.

The unwillingness to protest human rights violations and abuse of separation of powers found among participants could be disrupted through 'sharing motivating stories of people's lives being improved because of raised critical consciousness and civic engagement activities' (Ajaps & Obiagu, 2021, p. 81). The criteria for teaching human rights (see Obiagu & Nwaubani, 2020) should be applied in civics classes to promote activist spirits among learners. It will be useful to emphasise in civic classes real life instances of where human rights protests and campaigns produced effective results. Popular among these real life human rights campaigns and protests include #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, #BringBackOurGirls at global front and #EnoughIsEnough, #EndSARSNow, #EndRapeNow, #SexForGrades protests at the Nigerian front. Some of these campaigns have impacted Nigerian policies and lives. For example, social media activism, #SexForGrades (BBC, 2019) led to governments' launching of email ([sexforgrades@fccpc.gov.ng](mailto:sexforgrades@fccpc.gov.ng)) for reporting sexual harassment and reconsideration of a Bill to that effect (Vanguard, 2019). Also, online and offline protests against hate speech bill that proposed death sentence for hate speech led to senates' agreement to expunge the provision from the Bill (Daka, 2020); protest against Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) violations of human rights led to its disbandment.

There is need to take the issue of corruption seriously in education for democracy; corruption presents a big threat to democratic processes in Africa and Nigeria in particular. For other democratic values to be realised, the ability to resist corruption must be very strong. Critical education for democracy should gear towards empowering learners with the knowledge, skills, and experiences of using social media and other protesting tools for promoting democratic values and behaviours. It should empower learners for sociopolitical resilience and corruption resistance and avoidance. Given that females who participate less in democratic activities showed higher positive attitude towards democratic principles, critical democracy education should aim at disrupting structural issues, such as patriarchy, that hamper women's participation in a democracy. A suggestion would be challenging gender stereotypes in civics classes and providing opportunities for girls to participate in making decisions in their class and school.



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