# Popular Education, Engagement Related Issues as Correlates of Citizens' Involvement in Partisan Politics in Abeokuta Metropolis, Nigeria

[1]**Peluola Oladehinde Titiloye, Ph.D**
*titiloyepeluola@gmail.com*

[1]**Zipporah Olufemi Egunjobi, Ph.D**
*zipporahegunjobi@gmail.com*

[1]**Osagie Oluwaniyi Johnson, Ph.D**
[1]*Federal College of Education, Abeokuta*
*Ogun State, Nigeria*

**Abstract**

*This study investigated popular education and engagement related issues as correlates of citizens' involvement in partisan politics in Abeokuta metropolis. This is with the aim of improving the level of citizens' involvement in partisan politics and political participation. Using a quantitative research design, the study surveyed a sample size of 268 adults of voting age, using a structured questionnaire, to assess their political awareness and other significant engagement related issues in relation to their involvement in partisan politics. Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient was used to analyse the data. The findings highlighted the critical role that popular education plays in promoting active political engagement among citizens. The study equally highlighted that social engagement-related issues are significantly related to citizens' involvement in partisan politics. It was recommended that Popular education programmes should focus on enhancing citizens' understanding of political systems, party dynamics, and right to active democratic participation. Also, citizens should be trained to critically assess political information, identify bias, and discern reliable sources. This will help them engage in partisan politics in a more informed manner, avoiding misinformation that could influence their political decisions negatively, among others.*

**Keywords:** popular education, engagement, related issues, citizens' involvement, partisan politics.

## Introduction

The modern world functions within institutional frameworks. One of these institutions is the political institution, notably democracy, which is often regarded as the most effective system of governance globally. This assumption is anchored on the ideals of political inclusiveness and the philosophy of good governance. Democracy, without passing any verdict, provides adult individuals of voting age with the opportunity to participate in politics and governance. It enables citizens to exercise their civic responsibilities in recruiting, selecting, and ensuring the orderly succession of political leadership through registered political associations (Owode et al., 2017; Sotoyinbo, 2023).

Building individual and community capacity, as well as providing appropriate education and information in all facets of life is the hallmark of popular education. Popular education, as a process aimed at empowering individuals through critical thinking and active participation, intersects with the democratic framework by fostering informed political engagement. Popular education emphasizes collective learning and action to address societal inequalities, particularly through civic education initiatives that enable individuals to understand and exercise their rights within democratic systems (Freire, 2000). A central tenet of popular education in the submission of Torres and Fischman (1994) is the notion of conscientization or critical consciousness. This aligns with the democratic ideal that power lies not merely in the numerical strength of political parties but in the depth and breadth of political awareness and active participation that permeate democratic practice (Nuka et al., 2015). Fundamentally, without robust citizens' engagement, democracy risks losing its legitimacy (Birch, 2007).

However, the effective functioning of democracy depends on the active involvement of an informed populace. Popular education helps bridge the gap between political literacy and political participation by promoting critical awareness and fostering capacities for collective action. By encouraging active citizenship, popular education serves as a foundation for democratization processes, enabling individuals to influence decision-making and leadership selection. Without such education, marginalized groups often face exclusion from political processes, reinforcing societal inequalities.

Democracy upholds the principle of pluralism (inclusivity), where individuals are at liberty to organize political associations/parties, participate in elections, and express diverse opinions without fear of intimidation or harassment (Birch, 2007). Popular education plays a significant role here, as it not only equips citizens with the requisite knowledge to engage with political processes but also fosters resilience against

misinformation and intimidation, which are potent tools used to subvert democratic participation (Gaventa, 2006). As Kitschelt and Rehm (2008) argue, political involvement acts as a link between the public and the political elites. Popular education strengthens this linkage by encouraging critical reflection and active engagement, ensuring that diverse voices are heard in the democratic discourse.

The process of political participation enables citizens to articulate their choices, concerns, and demands to decision-makers. In a democracy, equal political voice is essential for safeguarding individual and collective interests. Popular education contributes to this equity by empowering those who might otherwise be excluded, ensuring that even the most marginalized have opportunities to participate in and influence political processes. By amplifying the voices of the marginalized, popular education helps democracy fulfill its promise of inclusivity and fairness.

In essence, democracy and popular education have a relationship that can be described as symbiotic. While the framework for citizen participation in partisan politics is provided by democracy, popular education promotes the critical awareness and requisite skills necessary for meaningful engagement. Together, they ensure that governance is responsive, inclusive, and reflective of the people's will.

Despite the underlying importance attached to citizens' engagement in partisan politics for democratic governance, many people tend to become disengaged and isolated and from the political process. Political apathy, discouraging and poor voters' turnout often characterize the political landscape. Lots of studies (Sotoyinbo, 2023; Oluwatusin & Daisi, 2017; Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006; Ake, 2000) have been carried out which collectively have underscored the fact that, inadequate popular education and engagement-related factors significantly contribute to this issue. As an illustration, Oluwatusin and Daisi (2017) carried out a study on citizenship education and political participation among Nigerian students: A case study of the Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti. The study emphasized that, issues pertaining to patriotism should be properly translated into actions by the recipients of civic education, for the impact of political education to be adequately felt.

In the same manner, Ake (2000) examined the Feasibility of Democracy in Africa'. The study highlighted the need for a more people-centered approach to political education to counteract widespread ignorance and apathy. Basically, inadequate popular education, political conscientization, and critical reasoning skills often constitute serious hindrances to citizens' meaningful participation in partisan politics. As Freire's critical pedagogy

suggests, education must empower individuals to critically engage with their socio-political realities, a principle that has yet to be effectively implemented in many African contexts. Beyond educational deficits, political propaganda, dirty campaigns, and deliberate misinformation often exacerbate the distortion of citizens' knowledge of political issues. As enunciated by Sotoyinbo (2023), other variables that further worsen the situation, include systemic corruption, election result manipulation, vote-buying, and political thuggery, which undermine trust in the electoral process. In addition to this are issues pertaining to, feelings of despondency and fatalism, as well as voting along gender lines, ethno-religious and regional line among others, all continue to stifle democratic experiments and political participation in many Sub-Saharan African nations and societies (Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006).

**Research questions**

The following questions were answered in the study:

1)  To what extent does popular education relate with political participation of citizens?

2)  How does social engagement related issues relate with citizens' involvement in partisan politics?

**Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated for the study:

**Ho1:** There is no significant relationship between popular education and citizens' political participation.

**Ho2:** There is no significant relationship between social engagement related issues of the citizens and their involvements in partisan politics.

**Methodology**

This study employed a descriptive research design, specifically using a correlational design to examine the relationships between popular education, engagement-related issues, and citizens' involvement in partisan politics.

The population for this study consisted of citizens within Abeokuta metropolis, Ogun State, Nigeria who are eligible to participate in political activities. The stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation across demographics such as age, gender, educational background, and socio-economic status. The simple random sampling technique was adopted to select a sample size of 268 adults of voting age as the sample for this study.

A 10-item self-structured questionnaire, designed by the researchers, was the instrument utilized for the study. The research instrument was named Popular Education and Engagement Related Issues Questionnaire (PEERIQ). The questionnaire consisted of two main sections. Section A gathered demographic information while section B was on popular education and engagement related issues. The questionnaire adopted the 4- point Likert scale system of SA- Strongly Agree (4 points), A-Agree (3 points), D-Disagree (2-points), SD-Strongly Disagree (1 point).

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts and academics. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using the Cronbach's Alpha method to measure internal consistency. A reliability coefficient of 0.77 was considered acceptable for the study.
Data collected was analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient.

## Presentation of results

**Ho1:** There is no significant relationship between popular education and citizens' political participation.

**Table 1:** Correlations between popular education and citizens' political participation

| | Popular education | Citizens' political participation |
|---|---|---|
| Popular education | 1.00 | .675** |
| Citizens' political participation | .675** | 1.00 |
| N | 268 | 268 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 |

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

The analysis of Table 1, which examines the relationship between popular education and citizens' political participation, reveals a statistically significant positive correlation. The Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient of 0.675 suggests a strong association between popular education and political participation, indicating that as popular education levels increase, political participation among citizens also tends to rise. This correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (p = 0.000), providing robust evidence against the null hypothesis (Ho1) and confirming that popular education has a substantial influence on political participation. With a sample size of 268, the findings highlighted the critical role that popular education plays in promoting active political engagement among citizens.

**Ho2:** There is no significant relationship between social engagement related issues of the citizens and their involvements in partisan politics.

**Table 2:** Social engagement related issues of the citizens and their involvements in partisan politics

|  | Social engagement-related issues of the citizens | Citizens' involvement in partisan politics |
|---|---|---|
| Social engagement-related issues of the citizens | 1.00 | .470** |
| Citizens' involvement in partisan politics | .470** | 1.00 |
| N | 268 | 268 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 |

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

The analysis of Hypothesis 2 (Ho2), which examines the relationship between citizens' social engagement-related issues and their involvement in partisan politics, indicates a statistically significant positive correlation. The Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient of 0.470 suggests a moderate relationship, meaning that as citizens' engagement in social issues increases, their involvement in partisan politics tends to increase as well. This correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (p = 0.000), indicating a very low likelihood of this association occurring by chance. With a sample size of 268, the data strongly supports rejecting the null hypothesis and concludes that social engagement-related issues are significantly related to citizens' involvement in partisan politics.

**Discussion of findings**
The findings from Table 1 provide evidence that there exists a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between popular education and citizens' political participation. The Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient of 0.675 underscores the strength of this association, suggesting that higher levels of popular education are closely linked to increased political engagement among citizens. The significant level of p=0.000 confirms the robustness of this relationship, indicating that it is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

This result implies that popular education plays a pivotal role in fostering political awareness, civic responsibility, and active participation in political processes. It aligns with prior studies (Manuwa, 2023; Sotoyinbo, 2023; Oluwatusin & Daisi, 2017, Agbaje & Adejumobi, 2006; Ake, 2000) that emphasize the importance of education in enhancing individuals' understanding of political systems and their confidence to participate. Given these findings, the null hypothesis 1 is rejected, affirming that popular education significantly influences political participation. These results highlight the need for policymakers to prioritize educational programmes aimed at empowering citizens with knowledge and skills that encourage their active involvement in democratic processes.

Table 2 reveals a moderate yet statistically significant positive relationship between citizens' social engagement and their involvement in partisan politics. The Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient of 0.470 suggests that as citizens become more engaged with social issues, they are more likely to participate in partisan political activities. This moderate association reflects the interconnected nature of social awareness and political allegiance, where social engagement serves as a precursor to deeper political involvement.

The significant level of p=0.000 strongly supports the validity of this relationship and provides sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis (Ho2). These findings suggest that social engagement not only fosters community involvement but also influences citizens' political preferences and decisions to align with political parties. This finding aligns with the studies by Manuwa (2023), Owode et al. (2017), Nuka et al. (2015) and Birch (2007). This underscores the importance of addressing social issues as a means to stimulate greater political involvement. Future studies might explore the mechanisms through which social engagement translates into partisan behaviour, such as the role of community organizations, advocacy groups, and social networks.

**Conclusion**
The findings from this study demonstrate the significant influence of popular education and social engagement on citizens' political participation and involvement in partisan politics. The strong positive correlation between popular education and political participation underscores the transformative power of education in equipping citizens with the knowledge and confidence needed to actively engage in democratic processes. This highlights the importance of prioritizing educational initiatives that foster civic awareness and political literacy.

Similarly, the moderate positive relationship between social engagement and partisan political involvement reveals the critical role that engagement in social issues plays in shaping citizens' political behaviours. By addressing social issues and promoting community involvement, societies can encourage greater political participation, particularly within partisan structures. Overall, the study provides robust evidence that both popular education and social engagement are essential drivers of political engagement, emphasizing the need for integrated strategies to enhance these factors. Policymakers, educators, and community leaders should collaborate to create environments that empower citizens through education and meaningful engagement in societal issues, fostering a more active and informed electorate.

**Recommendations**

i.     Popular education programmes should focus on enhancing citizens' understanding of political systems, party dynamics, and democratic participation. A curriculum that emphasizes critical thinking, electoral processes, and political rights can empower individuals to engage more meaningfully in partisan politics.

ii.     Citizens should be trained to critically assess political information, identify bias, and discern reliable sources. This will help them engage in partisan politics in a more informed manner, avoiding misinformation that could influence their political decisions negatively.

iii.     Popular education programmes should be rooted in the communities they aim to serve. This will make them to be more effective.

iv.     As socio-economic factors often play a significant role in political engagement, programmes should be designed to address barriers that prevent lower-income citizens from participating in partisan politics. These may include financial support for attending political events, transportation to voting stations, and ensuring equitable access to education and information.

v.     Digital platforms should be harnessed to expand opportunities for political engagement. Social media, apps, and online forums can offer citizens new ways to connect with political parties and partake in discussions, especially for those who may find it difficult to engage in traditional, offline settings.

vi.     Political parties should adopt transparent and accountable practices. Popular education programmes should educate citizens on the importance of holding political leaders and parties accountable, encouraging more direct involvement in shaping party platforms and policies.

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