

## EVALUATING POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND REPRESENTATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the political participation and representation of persons with disabilities in Ondo State's politics from 1999 to 2019. It investigates the disparity between the small percentage of physically challenged individuals in the population and their underrepresentation in leadership roles, particularly in the executive and legislative branches of government. Drawing on participatory democracy theory and the action theory model of personality, the research employs both primary and secondary data sources, including interviews, surveys, and literature reviews. Analysis methods include frequency counts, percentages, and descriptive techniques. The study also examines environmental factors, societal perceptions, and psychological barriers affecting the political engagement of persons with disabilities. Findings offer valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, electoral bodies, political parties, and sociologists, aiming to address the challenges faced by physically challenged individuals in political participation and governance. Moreover, the study contributes to future research and discussions on democratic participation and representation in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Democracy, Disability, Exclusion, Representation, Physically Challenged Persons

### INTRODUCTION

In many countries, individuals with physical disabilities have historically faced exclusion from active participation and leadership roles in political, economic, and social spheres. This lack of inclusion has created significant gaps in addressing the needs and supporting the rights of people with disabilities, particularly in the context of fostering inclusive leadership. While the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities emphasizes the equal participation of individuals with disabilities in political life, many barriers persist, especially in Africa, hindering their ability to exercise their voting rights and run for office, despite legislative efforts and declarations of equal opportunities.

It's worth noting that approximately 15% of the global population lives with some form of physical disability, with a higher prevalence among women. Despite this significant demographic, systemic

barriers continue to impede their full inclusion and participation in society. The 12th session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, held in June 2019, highlighted the imperative of ensuring the inclusion of persons with disabilities in an evolving world. This involves recognizing that disability is not solely a result of impairments but also of attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder full participation. Gender equality is also underscored as a fundamental principle within this framework, emphasizing the interconnectedness of disability rights and broader social justice goals.

The active involvement of individuals in political and public affairs is fundamental to fostering socially inclusive development and upholding human rights. For persons with disabilities, engagement in political and public life serves as a platform for them to voice

their concerns, contribute to decision-making processes, and advocate for their rights within their communities and nations. However, despite the existence of anti-discrimination laws and international frameworks promoting their participation, individuals with disabilities in Nigeria often find themselves marginalized from political spheres, lacking representation in key decision-making positions.

In scholarly discourse, various researchers such as Mikko, Achille, Price, Virendrakumar, Nate, Thad E. H. & Alvarez, Wang, Somorin, and others have explored the right to political participation and representation for people with disabilities in Africa. Despite the mantra "Nothing about us without us," the absence of individuals with disabilities in positions of political influence undermines the principle of inclusive decision-making. Moreover, the physical environment remains largely inaccessible to people with disabilities, further limiting their participation.

As emphasized by Babalakin, the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the political process is essential for enhancing their participation and representation, ultimately contributing to a more equitable society. Political participation and representation extend beyond mere involvement in elections; they encompass the dynamic interplay of power relations between individuals, including those with and without disabilities. Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities underscores the obligation of states to ensure equal political rights and opportunities for individuals with disabilities, affirming their rightful place in shaping the decisions that affect their lives and communities.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is substantial evidence indicating that individuals with disabilities face disproportionately higher risks of household poverty and social exclusion across various domains such as employment, education, income, and material well-being. However, comparative studies often overlook this demographic as variables, resulting in a limited understanding of their experiences. Consequently, there is a lack of emphasis on the nuanced forms of exclusion, whether intentional or unintentional,

which hinder the active participation of people with disabilities in the political process.

Therefore, addressing this problem, which could be attitudinal or even systemic, will go a long way in addressing problems faced by physically challenged people regarding the level of their participation and representation in the democratic process.

**TABLE 1:** Distribution of population (2006) by sex and type of disability in Ondo State

S / N	SEX	TOTAL	TYPES OF DISABILITY						
			SEEING	HEARING	SPEAKING	MOBILITY	MENTAL	OTHER	NONE
1	MALE	1745057	8389	4780	6580	4752	1574	2878	1716104
2	FEMALE	1715820	6958	5348	6600	4456	1403	3223	1667832
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3460877</b>	<b>15347</b>	<b>10128</b>	<b>13180</b>	<b>9208</b>	<b>2977</b>	<b>6101</b>	<b>3403936</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>0.44</b>	<b>0.29</b>	<b>0.38</b>	<b>0.27</b>	<b>0.09</b>	<b>0.18</b>	<b>98.35</b>

Source: Demographic and vital statistics, Ondo State, Ministry of Economic Planning

However, regardless of the percentage level people with disabilities constitute in Ondo State, a formidable group of special people recognized by international organizations with special conventions like International Disability and Human Rights Convention, National Council on Disability (2002), convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (2008), National Organization on Disability, International Disability Alliance, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities Empowerment, Developmental Disabilities Organisations, Disabled people's International etc. and within Nigeria, have striven to project the voice of this marginalized demographic. There exist the other disabilities platforms such as: Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (1992), Association for the Comprehensive Empowerment of Nigerians with Disabilities, Center for Citizens with Disabilities and so and so forth. President Muhammadu Buhari has signed the bill on the discrimination against persons with disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2019 into law, while the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic

of Nigeria, section 17(3)(a) (as amended) gave the nod to the rights of people with disabilities, while Nigerians with Disability Decree of 1993 by the Federal Military Government bordered on Disability Rights, Education and Defense fund (DREDF). As such, they need to be heard, felt, accommodated and seen in the political spectrum.

Table 2: showing gross representation of physically challenged people in Ondo State House of Assembly

Source: Field Work Generated (2020).

Note: The above table excludes all other political offices and political appointments in the history of Ondo state. In spite of the above, none of the people with disabilities was given political appointment during the years under review as well.

With the absence of physically challenged persons in political positions, be it elective or appointive, the following questions become germane in examining the problem of their participation in the polity: How can physically challenged persons' participation and representation in politics be improved both in elective and appointive positions?

ii. How can the barriers which prevent the participation of people with disabilities and their families in the political processes be reduced or removed?

iii. How can the government of Ondo State and the civil societies in the state be aware of disability issues and the rights of persons with disabilities and their families to participate in political processes?

iv. How can stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities negatively affect their participation and representation?

v. How can people with disabilities impact in political participation and representation improve development of Ondo State specifically, and Nigeria, generally?

In comparative analysis of African nations on people with disabilities' towards political participation and representation, the table below indicates the year and level of people

S/N	PERIOD	NUMBER OF ONDO STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY MEMBERSHIP	NUMBER OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY	REMARKS
1	1999-2003	26	-	None of the PWDs was elected
2	2003-2007	26	-	-
3	2007-2011	26	-	-
4	2011-2015	26	-	-
5	2015-2018	26	-	-
TOTAL		130	-	-

with disabilities involvement in political and public life in selected countries in Africa:

**Table 3: showing the year of affirmative legislation for PWD and the degree of their involvement in public life in selected countries in Africa.**

S/N	NAME OF COUNTRY	YEAR OF LEGISLATION OF PWDS	DEGREE OF INVOLVEMENT IN BOTH POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE
1	Uganda	PWDs Act of 1997	12 Seats reserved for PWDs
2	Tanzania	PWD Act of 2010, Article 51	Allowed to vote, hold public office

3	Kenya	PWD Act of 2015, Article 38	Allowed to involved in any political matters
4	Sierra Leone	PWD Act of 2010	Allowed to cast their votes with a companion
5	Nigeria	PWD Act of 2019 Electoral Act 2010(56) (1-2)	Allowed as they may request support from the registration officer to complete the registration form.
6	Mauritius	PWD Act of 2011	
7	Zimbabwe	PWD Act of 1992.	Allowed for self-representation
8	Mauritania	PWD Act of 2006, Article 11	Allowed
9	Burkina Faso	PWD Act of 2010, Article 40	Allowed, but not in- capacitated
10	Burundi	PWD Act of 2014	Allowed, but not with mental illness people.

Sources: Virendrakumar, Jolley, Badu S/Schmidt, 2018:542 and the researchers 'compilations, 2020

The exclusion of people with disabilities by political parties in their programmes is one of the fundamental reasons for their non-participation and representation. Though, protection and promotion of physically challenged people's rights are not well pronounced in Africa, but their aspirations, will and drive in the social, economic and political activities in their countries remain high. Therefore, the current research is topical and justifiable on the basis of the need to further investigate the physically challenged persons' political participation and representation in consolidated democracy like Nigeria.

The study will also be of immense benefits to political scientists, social analysts, electoral agencies, population experts, public policy analysts and economic planners in Ondo State and Nigeria in general. Furthermore, the study would be able to highlight and fill the major gaps in previous studies pertaining to democracy, population, the physically challenged person in public life in Ondo State in particular, and Nigeria as a whole

## OBJECTIVES

- i. To examine the level of the physically challenged persons' political participation and representation in Ondo State;

- ii. To interrogate the efficiency of physically challenged persons in both elective and appointive positions in the state;
- iii. To determine the efforts to secure more political participation and representation rights of the physically challenged persons or people with disabilities and;
- iv. To investigate and discuss the reasons (barriers) for the low involvement of physically challenged persons in political participation and representation in Ondo State of Nigeria

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The burgeoning body of literature concerning the political participation and representation of individuals with disabilities underscores a critical yet underexplored connection in Nigeria and specifically in Ondo State. The literature review serves as a foundational framework for the research, drawing upon a wealth of studies and publications within the realms of democracy, governance, human rights, and disability rights. Various scholars have contributed to this discourse, including Oluchi (2014), who highlights the intrinsic link between democracy and political participation, defining participation as both direct and indirect avenues through which the public influences socio-political decisions. Similarly, Falade (2014) emphasizes the pivotal role of political

participation, particularly in electoral processes, within representative democracy.

Johari (2009) delves into the concept of political participation, encompassing voluntary activities that enable members of society to engage in selecting their leaders and shaping public policy. Building on this, Ball (1976) as cited by Johari (2009), elucidates political representation as the process through which the views and desires of citizens are translated into governmental action by elected representatives. Gauba (2003) further elaborates on political participation as the active involvement of individuals and groups in governmental processes affecting their lives, while acknowledging that a person's disability status significantly influences their ability to participate in public and private spheres (Smith, 2011).

The discourse also highlights the importance of integrating individuals with disabilities into mainstream society, as advocated by Amusat (2009) and Abang (2007), who note advancements in the status of disabled individuals through disability movements and protective legislation. Magdalene, James, and Uminya (2015) stress the necessity of societal efforts to promote inclusion through education, rehabilitation, employment, and social support programs. Price (2018) reinforces the significance of political and public life as a vital component of socially inclusive development and the realization of human rights.

Overall, this literature review underscores the critical need for further exploration of the relationship between disability, political participation, and representation, shedding light on avenues for enhancing inclusivity and democracy within Nigerian and Ondo State contexts.

## **THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study shall adopt the theory of participatory democracy and action theory model of personality to midwife the work. Participatory democracy theory is a process of collective decision making that combines elements from both direct and representative democracy. Citizens have the power to decide on policy proposals and politicians assume the race of policy implementation. It implies that ultimate authority of governance rests with the people themselves as it repudiates the model of

democracy with regards to people's political participation as the basic principle of democracy (Sanchez-Pages & Aragonés, 2009; Gauba, 2003; Pateman, 2012).

Proponents, theorists and writers on theory of participatory democracy include Robert Oahl (1991), Macpherson C.B (1973), Carole Pateman and others all agreed that sovereignty not only originates in the people, it is also retained by the people.

The linkage of the theory to the study lies in the participation of the physically challenged persons or people with disabilities to bridge the gap between exclusion and involvement to representation. However, the defect of the theory hangs on the basis that it does not suggest any alternative system for its implementation, too permissive, undisciplined and uncontrollable for the crowd it generated (Gauba, 2003).

The other theory is the action theory model of personality. It is based on differentiated expectancy-value theory whose situations specific constructs are logically connected with personality constructs of generalized self-referential cognitions. The conventional political participation is predicted by situation – and action – specific variables and that the exposed political participation of political activists can be predicted best by situation-/action-specific non-specific motivational variables and that of political nonactivists can be predicted best by domain- specific personality variables (Krampen, 1988; Krampen, 1991; Okafor, 2017:). The theory represents a general model of works- related cognition and behaviour with implications for a wide range of issues.

The following amongst others are the proponents, theorists and writers of action theory model of personality: Krampen G. (1986), Nicholis, J.G. (1979), Epstein. R. & Komarita, S.S (1971), Gore, W. J. (1962), Herrmann, T. & Lanterman, E.D. (1985) Garske J.P. (1976), Beck, A.T. (1972) and so on and so forth.

The utility of the theory to the study rests on the basis of grouping physically challenged persons as group of personality demanding collective agitation for greater move and efforts in political participation and representation in the politics of Ondo State. It further stresses the arguments of people with disabilities (formidable group) as a special specie in action of

(group) model personality towards making better input in both political and public life as citizens of any given country.

The defects however lies on the basis that development of measures that operationalize the action theoretical person variables with reference to action model personality more precisely than the presently used measures of locus of control, trust and self-concept, is perhaps difficult and this tend to mix the action-theoretically differentiated constructs of competence, contingency, situational expectancies and their generalisations.

### LOCATION OF THE STUDY

The study was located in Ondo State. The state was created from the defunct Western region of Nigeria on the 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 1976 with its administrative capital in Akure. The state is located in the Western zone of the country. It is bounded by Ekiti, Osun, Edo, Ogun and Kogi States. The present Ondo state

has 18 Local Government Areas with a population of about 3,460,877 Yoruba speaking people who are mostly Muslims, Christians and traditional Worshippers. It is endowed with enormous natural resources and adequate manpower (both skilled and unskilled) and has significant number of primary and secondary schools and higher institutions of learning.

### STUDY AREA

The study was conducted in randomly selected urban and rural towns and communities in Ondo State using Nine (9) local governments out of the eighteen (18) local governments in the state. To achieve this, three local governments were randomly selected from each senatorial district. This was to ensure that the locations cut across the three senatorial districts in the state (Central, North and South).

**Table 4: Design outlay for selecting study area location**

S/N	SENATORIAL DISTRICT	LOCAL GOVT. TO BE SELECTED	NUMBER OF COMMUNITY TO BE SELECTED	TOTAL NO TO BE SELECTED	TOTAL AGGREGATE
1	Ondo Central	Ondo West	Igbado, Fagbo, Ondo Town, Laje, Bagbe.	5	15
		Akure South	Igbatoro, Aponmu, Ilara-mokin, OkeAro, Akure town	5	
		Ifedore	Igbara-oke, Ipogun, Owena, Ijare, Isarun	5	
2	Ondo South	Okitipupa	Ode Aye, Ilu Titun, Ijuodo, Okitipupa Igbotako.	5	15
		Oke-Igbo/Ile Oluji	Ile-Oluji, Oke-igbo, Ifetedo, Bankemo, Oloruntele	5	
		Ese-Odo	Asere, Akina, Zion, Epemubou, Baikiri Bibokepiri.	5	
3	Ondo North	Owo	Ipele, Ijebu, Uso, Emure-Ile, Idasen.	5	15
		Akoko South-West	Akungba, Oba, Oka Supare, Ayegunle.	5	
		Akoko North-East	Okeagbe, Ikaramu, Ese, Irun Eriti.	5	

TOTAL	3	9	45	45	45
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## REASON FOR THE STUDY AREA (LOCATIONS)

A total of Nine (9) Local Government out of Eighteen (18) Local Government Areas were selected for the study. This ensured that the state is adequately represented. The nine local Government and Forty-five (45) Communities selected are relatively appropriate for the chosen study.

## SAMPLE FRAME/PARTICIPANTS

The participants for the study cut across several demographics of the communities: physically challenged persons, youths and students, leaders of communities, academics and professionals.

## INTERVIEW

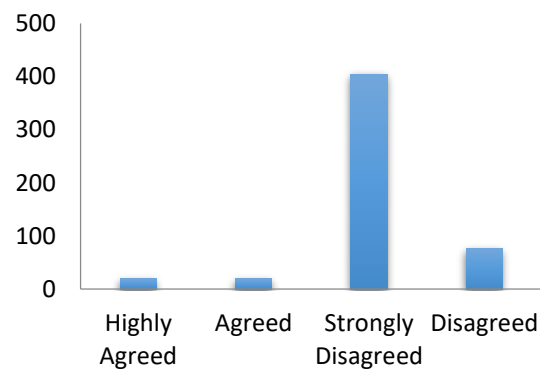
In the investigation, execution and realization of the aims and objectives of the study, both primary and secondary method were used for data collection. The technique of data collection from primary sources included questionnaire, oral interview while the secondary data were sourced from relevant textbooks, journals and internet materials. Analysis of the data was done using through frequency counts, percentage and other descriptive methods.

## METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Structured questionnaire and personal interviews were used to elicit information from the respondents, while secondary data were collected from textbooks, journals, internet materials on the physically challenged persons' political participation and representation in politics of Ondo State.

**TABLE 5:** Democratic process in Ondo State has enhanced physically challenged persons' participation in politics and governance.

Fig 1: Democratic process in Ondo State has enhanced physically challenged persons' participation in politics and governance

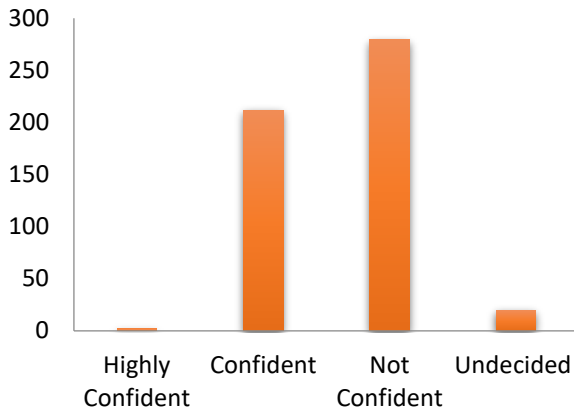


The result from table 5 and figure 1 showed that 402(77.6%) of the respondents strongly disagreed and 20(3.9%) highly agreed while 76(14.7%) disagreed and 20(3.9%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the democratic process in Ondo state has enhanced pcps' participation in governance and participation. The outcome above showed that majority (92.3%) of the respondents strongly disagreed that Democratic practice in Ondo State has been enabling factor for effective physically challenged persons' participation in Politics and Governance of Ondo State.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Agreed	20	3.9
Agreed	20	3.9
Strongly Disagreed	402	77.6
Disagreed	76	14.7

**TABLE 6:** Are you confident that electoral laws (in practice) in Nigeria are fair to physically challenged persons' vis-à-vis people that suffer no disability?

Fig. 2: Are you confident that electoral laws (in practice) in Nigeria are fair to physically challenged persons vis-à-vis people that suffer no disability?

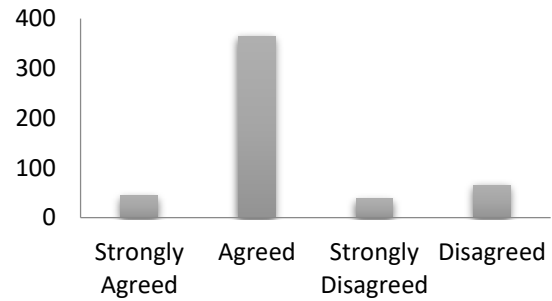


The outcome from table 6 and fig. 2 revealed that 280(54.4%) of the respondents were not confident and 2(0.4%) were highly confident, while 212(41.2%) were confident while 20(3.9%) of the respondents were undecided. The result above showed that majority of the respondents were not confident that electoral laws in Nigeria are fair to physically challenged persons vis-à-vis people who suffer no disability.

**TABLE 7:** Do you agree that barriers/exclusion continue to be impediment physically challenged persons' political participation / representation?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Confident	2	0.4
Confident	212	41.2
Not Confident	208	54.5
Undecided	20	3.9

Fig 3: Do you agree that barriers/exclusion to be impediments towards physically challenged person's political participation /representation?

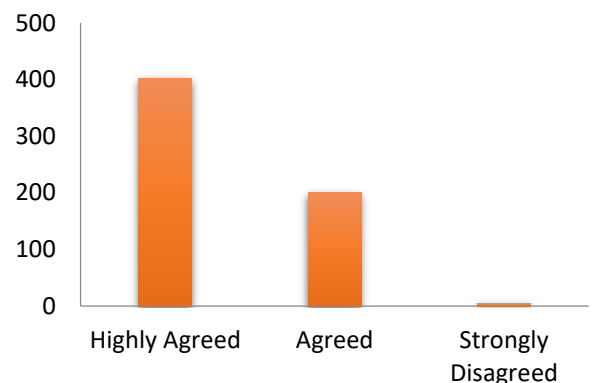


The result from Table 7 and fig. 3 revealed that 365(71.2%) of the respondents agreed and 44(8.6%) highly agreed, that exclusion continue to act as barrier against physically challenged persons' political participation and representation whereas only 38(7.4%) strongly disagreed and 66(12.9%) of the disagreed. The result showed that majority (79.8%) of the respondents agreed that barriers and exclusions have continued to be impediments toward physically challenged persons' participation /representation in Ondo State

**TABLE 8:** Do you agree that higher risks are issues to physically challenged persons' Political participation/representation?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Agreed	402	77.6
Agreed	200	21.0
Strongly Disagreed	05	1.4

Fig.4: Do you agree that higher risks are issues to physically challenged persons' Political participation/representation?



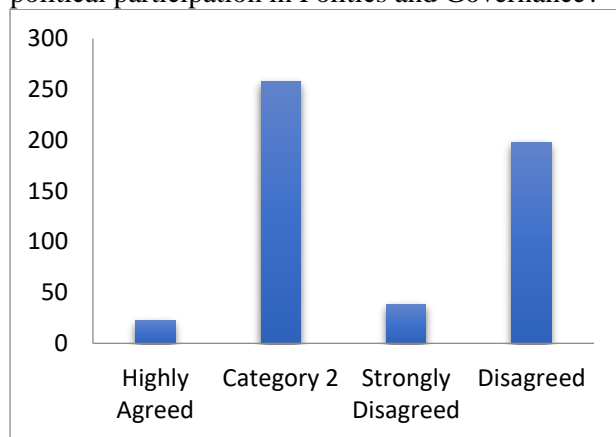


The outcome from table 8 and fig.4 showed that 200(21.0%) of the respondents agreed and 402(77.6%) of them highly agreed while 5(1.4%) of the respondents strongly disagreed. With such opinion, this means that majority (98.6%) of the respondents highly agreed that higher risks are issues to physically challenged persons' in political participation and representation in Ondo State.

**TABLE 9:** Do you agree that non-access to political activities in Ondo State has hindered greater

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Agreed	22	4.3
Agreed	258	50.0
Strongly Disagreed	38	7.4
Disagreed	198	38.4

Fig 5: Do you agree that non-access to political activities in Ondo State has hindered greater participation of physically challenged persons; political participation in Politics and Governance?

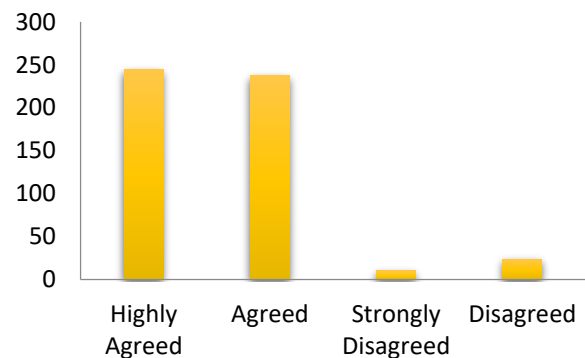


The result revealed from Table 9 and fig. 5 that 258(50.0%) of the respondents agreed and 22(4.3%) highly agreed, while only 198(38.4%) disagreed and 38(7.4%) of the respondents strongly disagreed that non-access to political activities in Ondo state. The result showed that a slim majority (54.3%) of the respondents agreed that political activities of physically challenged persons' do influence their participation in Politics and Governance.

**TABLE 10:** Do you agree that offer of free ticket for physically challenged persons by the various political parties can enhance their political participation and representation?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Agreed	244	47.3
Agreed	238	46.1
Strongly Disagreed	10	1.9
Disagreed	24	4.7

Fig 6: Do you agree that offer of waivers for physically challenged persons by the various political parties can enhance their political participation and representation?



The result from table 10 and fig 6 showed that 238(46.1%) of the respondents agreed and 244(47.3%) highly agreed that offer of waivers for physically challenged persons by the various political parties can enhance their political participation and representation. On the contrary, 24(4.7%) disagreed and 10(1.9%) of the respondents strongly disagreed with such view. The result above indicated that majority (93.4%) of the respondents highly agreed that offer of waivers for physically challenged persons by the various political parties can enhance their political participation and representation.

### DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

Simple percentage and frequency count were used to analyse the data gathered from the field work.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The research found out the following:

- i. Contributed to knowledge about people with disabilities/physically challenged persons' political participation and representation in the politics of Ondo State;
- ii. Ascertained the level of degree of physically challenged persons/people with disabilities involvement in the political participation and representation in politics of Ondo State;
- iii. Identified factors responsible for people with disabilities/physically challenged persons' exclusion from political participation representation in politics of Ondo State; and
- iv. Identified the plights or challenges of other indicators /variables that challenged persons continue to face in the consolidation of Ondo State democracy.

## EXPECTED CONTRIBUTIONS

The study created further awareness as regards the imperative for more active people with disabilities/physically challenged persons' political participation and representation in politics of Ondo State considering that they represent a distinct demographic within the system, and protecting their interest will help in the sustainability of the Nigerian project at large.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is inferable from the empirical research study that physically challenged-persons have been under-represented, marginalized and excluded in the political system of Ondo State governance between 1999 and 2018 as there was no single person from the disabilities demographic family included in any elective or appointive positions. Therefore, the study recommends that political should parties agree to accommodate physically challenged aspirants to engage fully in political participation and representation in the governance of Ondo State. Enabling environment for their smooth participation has been enhanced through electoral laws that recognise their disabilities status. In recognition of the disability right in Nigeria, and across the world, the physically challenged persons should be encouraged to participate actively in democracy and governance through focused human capital

development and enhanced platform for participation for the needed overall development and inclusiveness of the political system.

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