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Abstract

This paper investigates the dichotomies and convergences in trust, participation and political attitudes among citizens in Nigeria and Cameroon, situating these orientations within historical legacies, institutional arrangements, and civic culture. Political attitudes—citizens' beliefs, values, and predispositions toward governments, institutions, and policies—are central to democratic consolidation and nation-building. While Nigeria demonstrates higher political awareness and active participation accompanied by distrust in institutions, Cameroon exhibits comparatively lower engagement yet similar concerns about governance performance. Using secondary data from Afrobarometer surveys (2021–2024), Nigeria Social Cohesion Survey (2025), and scholarly literature, the study identifies differences and similarities in citizen attitudes and discusses their implications for nation-building. Findings highlighted that divergent attitudes can impede inclusivity and cohesion, while convergences offer avenues for shared reform and institutional strengthening mechanism. The study concludes with policy recommendations aimed at enhancing civic engagement, institutional trust, and inclusive governance in both contexts. This paper brings out the research question on the extent of Trust, participation and political attitudes of citizens.

Keywords: *Convergence, Dichotomies, Participation, Political attitudes, Trust*

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INTRODUCTION

Political attitudes encompass the psychological orientations of citizens toward political institutions, actors, and policies, influencing participation, trust, and governance evaluations. In Africa, these attitudes are shaped by colonial histories, ethnic diversity, institutional legacies, and democratic experiences. Nigeria and Cameroon provide contrasting yet comparable case studies: both share colonial histories and ethno linguistic diversity, but their political systems differ substantially. Before the Republican constitution of 1963, there were few constitutional changes which took place in Nigeria. First, in 1961 following a U.N. supervised plebiscite the southern Cameroons, which had been administered as part of Nigeria since 1916 after its conquest from Germans during the first world war seceded from Nigeria and merged with the French Cameroons whilst the Northern part Voted to merge with Nigeria as the saudauna province. Nigeria's federalism, history of alternating military and civilian rule, and competitive elections have produced a politically engaged but often skeptical citizenry. Cameroon, under long-term centralized governance and limited political pluralism, exhibits lower civic participation and higher political apathy. Despite these contrasts, both countries converge in citizens' support for democracy, pluralism, and governance reform. This study explores dichotomies (differences) and convergences (similarities) in political attitudes between Nigeria and Cameroon, analyzing their implications for nation-building. This paper express the level of trust, degree of participation and political attitudes of citizens to their countries/leaders (Nigeria and

Cameroon). Understanding these dynamics informs policies for civic engagement, institutional trust, and national cohesion.

Conceptual Clarification

Political Attitudes: Citizens' beliefs, values, and predispositions toward governments, institutions, and policies that influence political behavior and participation (Afrobarometer, 2023). A political attitude refers to an individual's consistent beliefs, values, and feelings about political issues, policies, and institutions. These attitudes influence how people perceive political events and can shape their behaviors and choices in the political realm. These attitudes are a key component of a person's belief system and are often shaped by factors like personal values, ideology, demographics, and experiences. They also influence and are influenced by political behavior, such as voting among others.

Dichotomies and Convergences:

Dichotomies refers to the division or contrast between two things that are, or are represented as being, opposed or entirely different. Dichotomy means that something has been divided into two parts. These two parts are usually in opposition to each other and create conflict or tension in the story. Dichotomy can occur within a single character who experiences an inner conflict, or it can apply to the broader theme or storyline of a narrative.

Convergences refer to shared patterns in political attitudes across contexts. It is the similarities of two or more things, Ideas, theories and phenomena.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study employs Political Culture Theory and Political Opportunity Structure Theory:

Political culture defined in the (*Encyclopedia of social sciences*) as the set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments which give order and meaning to a political process and which provide the underlying assumption and rules that govern behaviour in political system.it encompasses both the political ideals and the operating norms of a polity.

Political Culture Theory (*Almond & Verba, 1963*)

In their 1963 book *The Civic Culture*, Almond and Verba defined political culture as the "distribution of patterns of orientations toward political objects among the members of a nation". They proposed three types of political culture: parochial, where citizens are barely aware of the central government; subject, where citizens are aware of government but do not participate; and participant, where citizens are aware of and actively involved in the political process. The authors also argued that a stable democracy requires a "civic culture," which is a blend of all three, where citizens are active but willing to accept outcomes.it posits that citizens' values, norms, and socialization shape political behavior. In Africa, historical legacies, ethnic diversity, and institutional evolution shape citizens' political orientations (*Bratton & van de Walle, 2021*). Nigeria reflects a participant-subject culture; Cameroon reflects a subject- parochial culture.

Political Opportunity Structure Theory (*Tarrow, 2020*)

Political opportunity structure (POS) refers to the intersection between political opportunities and opportunity structure. This is important because not every political opportunity is structural in nature (*Koopmans1999*).The *political* in POS should be understood in a wide sense, and not restricted to institutional factors. Political opportunity structure is a component of the wider political environment. The basis premise is that changes in the environment can trigger protest behaviour

Political opportunity structure (POS) theory, developed by scholars including Sidney Tarrow, posits that social movements emerge and are shaped by the political system's openness to them, not just by the presence of grievances. In 2020, this theory remains a key framework, though it has been updated to consider new factors like transnationalism and a broader range of opportunities beyond national political systems. POS now emphasizes that structures create both opportunities and constraints for movements, and their effects are contingent on a complex interplay of political, strategic, and cultural factors.it suggests that the political and institutional environment—regime type, civic freedoms, governance quality—modulates citizens' political attitudes. Nigeria's democratic framework allows some engagement despite corruption and elite capture; Cameroon's centralized governance restricts civic space, fostering political passivity. These frameworks integrate cultural dispositions and opportunity structures to explain how political attitudes emerge and influence nation-building outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

The study uses secondary sources of the following methods

Afrobarometer Surveys-

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, independent, non-partisan research network that measures public attitudes on economic, political and social matters in Africa. Afrobarometer measures the social, political, and economic atmosphere in more than 30 countries in Africa. How is this done? It conduct face-to-face interviews with a randomly selected, nationally representative sample of 1,200-2,400 adult citizens in each country. Detailed information on its survey methodology can be found in our survey manual.

Data collection

A national partner in each of the survey countries is responsible for collecting high-quality data and disseminating the findings at the country level. Afrobarometer provides support and oversight at each stage of the process. National partners train interviewers (usually in a five-day workshop) to ensure that they are familiar with the questionnaire in national and local languages, the sampling protocol, and best field practices, and are confident in applying Afrobarometer's survey methodology.

Shortly after the training, teams of four interviewers and one field supervisor travel to enumeration areas in all parts of the country. Each national sample is distributed across regions/states/provinces and urban/rural areas in proportion to their share in the national

population. Every adult citizen has an equal chance of being selected as a respondent.

Interviews, conducted in a language of the respondent's choice using electronic tablets, usually take about an hour. Responses are strictly confidential. It sample sizes yield country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 to 3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

Data quality

The national partners verify and check their data for any incomplete, improperly formatted, or inaccurate records. Data managers at our regional core partners and at Afrobarometer clean and finalise the data sets.

Data analysis and reporting

National partners and Afrobarometer staff analyse the data and disseminate findings through events at the country, regional, and global levels as well as through news releases, social media, and a range of analytical publications. All data sets are made publicly available and may be analysed free of charge with our online data analysis (ODA) tool. Its goal is to share the views of ordinary citizens as widely as possible, amplifying their voices in policy- and decision-making processes that affect their lives. Afrobarometer surveys (Rounds 8–10, 2021–2024) – measures of trust, participation, and governance perceptions.

Peer-Reviewed Journals – A peer reviewed or referred journals is a publication that features articles that have been rigorously evaluated by other experts in same field before being published. It have an editorial

board of subject experts who review and evaluate submitted articles before accepting them for publication. This process ensures the article's quality, Accuracy, and scientific merit. The goal is to uphold high standards of research and scholarship in that specific discipline. In this paper, it reviewed the African Affairs, Journal of Modern African Studies, Commonwealth & Comparative Politics.

Reports and Polls –In this paper, it uses the Nigeria Social Cohesion Survey (2025), Africa Polling Institute, NGO analyses of elections.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL ATTITUDES

Comparative analysis identifies dichotomies and convergences across multiple political attitude dimensions and links them to nation-building implications. Political attitudes are analyzed across six dimensions: awareness, participation, trust, perception of democracy, historical influence, and civic culture.

1. Political Awareness

Political awareness is the extent to which an individual pays attention to politics and understands what he or she has encountered. political awareness operates in the political information exchange between the individual and various sources of political messages communicated in the public space. Nigeria exhibits high political awareness, with 60% of citizens actively following political developments (Afrobarometer, 2024). Urban youth, civil society networks, and social media contribute to this

engagement. In contrast, Cameroon has moderate awareness (35–40%) due to centralized governance, restricted press freedom, and fear of reprisal. Implication: Nigeria's higher awareness fosters engagement and reform pressures, while Cameroon's limited awareness constrains participatory nation-building.

2. Civic participation

Civic participation or civic engagement is any individual or group activity addressing issues of public concern. civic engagement includes communities working together or individuals working alone in both political and non-political actions to protect public values or make a change in a community. Civic participation is robust in Nigeria (55% engagement) through voting, protests, petitions, and community advocacy (Afrobarometer, 2024). In Cameroon, participation is lower (25–30%) and largely confined to non-political community initiatives due to political restrictions. Implication: Nigeria's active citizenry can enhance nation-building if institutional trust is restored; Cameroon requires expansion of civic spaces for effective engagement.

3. Trust in Institutions

Trust in institutions is a fundamental requirement for the proper functioning of society, particularly in a democracy. Trust in public institutions manifests itself when citizens assess them as promise-keeping, accountable, efficient, competent, fair, and honest (Kaasa & Andriani, 2021). When individuals have trust in a public institution, they expect their interaction with authorities to have a positive outcome rather than being detrimental to them (Beesley & Hawkins,

2022). Societies live harmoniously only when public institutions play their role in generating the trust necessary for collective life (Roché, 2016, p.12). As Newton and Norris (2000, p. 56) have noted, “institutional trust acts as the cornerstone of social cohesion, ensuring that citizens cooperate and adhere to societal norms.” Trust in institutions underpins the stability and legitimacy of democratic governance, as emphasised by Easton (1975, p. 439), who argues that “without political trust, a system risks delegitimisation, and this can lead to social instability.”

When citizens trust institutions, they are more likely to show solidarity with other community members, respect laws and regulations, support government policies and programmes, and develop optimism about the future, a crucial determinant of economic growth (Cloutier, Zovighian, & Bove, 2023). By limiting uncertainty and transaction costs, trust in institutions also encourages investment and other economic activity (Putnam, 1993; Kaasa & Andriani, 2021). Conversely, a lack of trust in public institutions can lead to a range of social and political problems. A decline in institutional trust is linked with “a rise in societal fragmentation, where citizens become more prone to endorse populist and anti-establishment movements” (Hetherington, 2005, p. 101). In many countries, especially developing countries, low levels of public trust in government institutions are associated with acceptance of illegal behaviour such as tax fraud as well as increased polarisation and decreased support for the provision of public goods, all of which can pose obstacles for development (Beesley & Hawkins, 2022).

Moreover, low trust limits the state’s capacity to function efficiently, leading to a “vicious cycle of ineffective governance and growing distrust” (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008, p. 445). Such cycles are particularly harmful in fragile democracies, where institutional trust is already weak and the legitimacy of public institutions is often questioned (Norris, 2011). According to findings from Afrobarometer surveys in 39 African countries between late 2021 and mid-2023, Africans trust key institutions and leaders less than they did a decade ago. Only religious leaders, the army, and traditional leaders still enjoy majority trust, while political institutions are trusted least. In this paper, both countries experience low institutional trust. In Nigeria, <30% of citizens trust the executive, legislature, or electoral bodies (Nigeria Social Cohesion Survey, 2025), manifesting in contestation and activism. Cameroon’s low trust (25%) manifests as passive compliance, reflecting the enduring centralized authority and lack of accountability. Implication: Nigeria’s low trust pressures institutional reform; Cameroon’s passive distrust limits mobilization but maintains regime stability.

4. Perception of Democracy and Governance

In countries involved in peace processes, questions relating to governance often consume a significant portion of the discussions; typically demands for democratization, including elections and timeframes for transition, are addressed. Other related elements include discussions surrounding the nature of political participation, Electoral systems, issue of transparency and separation of powers. This paper portrays this as In Nigeria, 40% of

citizens are dissatisfied with democratic functioning, and 60% believe the country is on the wrong track (BusinessDay, 2024). Cameroonians support multiparty democracy (70%) but feel powerless to influence governance (60%). Implication: Nigeria's dissatisfaction drives accountability; Cameroon's low efficacy hinders reforms.

5. Historical and Cultural Influences

Nigeria's federalism and alternating democratic and military regimes have produced a dynamic but fragmented citizenry. Cameroon's centralized governance, dual colonial legacy, and long-term leadership continuity have fostered a subject-parochial political culture. Implication: Historical legacies explain divergent attitudes and influence cohesion, legitimacy, and nation-building pathways.

6. Dichotomies and Convergences

Dichotomy, (from Greek *dicha*, "apart," and *tomos*, "cutting"), a form of logical division consisting of the separation of a class into two subclasses, one of which has and the other has not a certain quality or attribute. It is a division or contrast between two things that are, or are represented as being, opposed or entirely different. Dichotomies of this paper include differences in participation, awareness, and trust.

Convergence is the fact that two or more things, ideas, etc. become similar or come together: a convergence of interests/opinions/ideas. Convergences include broad support for democracy and dissatisfaction with governance. These patterns indicate where targeted reforms can

enhance citizen engagement and institutional legitimacy.

IMPLICATIONS OF TRUST PARTICIPATION AND ARTITUDE ON NIGERIA AND CAMEROON

For Nation-Building

Nation-Building and Its Implications in Nigeria and Cameroon

Nation-building refers to deliberate efforts by the state to create a shared national identity, legitimate institutions, and social cohesion. In multiethnic states like Nigeria and Cameroon, these efforts strongly influence citizens' trust in government, their willingness to participate in politics, and their broader political attitudes.

Implications for Trust in Government and Institutions

Nigeria

Ethno-regional cleavages (e.g., Hausa–Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo) reduce trust in central institutions. Many citizens view state actions through the lens of ethnic favoritism. Frequent corruption scandals, weak public services, and inconsistent rule of law undermine trust. Security issues (Boko Haram, banditry, secessionist tensions) also erode confidence that the state can protect citizens. Nation-building efforts (e.g., federal character principle, NYSC) have not fully overcome perceptions of marginalization.

Implication: Low trust in federal institutions leads to reliance on ethnic, religious, or local networks over the national government.

JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)

Cameroon

Trust is heavily shaped by the dominance of the ruling party (CPDM) and a highly centralized government under a long-term president. Francophone–Anglophone tensions and perceptions of structural discrimination severely damage trust among Anglophone populations. Limited political pluralism and constrained civic space weaken belief that institutions serve all citizens fairly.

Implication: Citizens—especially in Anglophone regions—exhibit deep mistrust toward the state, viewing institutions as partisan or repressive rather than nation-building tools.

Implications for Political Participation

Nigeria

Despite low trust, political participation is relatively high—especially during elections—because of competitive multiparty politics. Participation often takes ethnically mobilized forms (identity-based voting blocs). Social media activism (e.g., #EndSARS) demonstrates growing youth-driven civic engagement. However, violence, vote buying, and electoral malpractice discourage consistent participation. **Implication:** Nation-building failures create participation that is fragmented and identity-driven, rather than based on a unified national agenda.

Cameroon

Participation is lower due to: Limited political competition, Fear of repression, Electoral irregularities In Anglophone regions, civil conflict and marginalization reduce participation further. Some participation takes the form of protest, but these are often

suppressed. **Implication:** Nation-building strategies that rely on central control and suppression reduce citizen participation and weaken democratic consolidation

Implications for Political Attitudes

Nigeria

Nation-building efforts coexist with: Strong ethnicity-based political attitudes, Distrust in electoral integrity, Rising support among youth for political reform and accountability and growing cynicism about government capacity. **Result:** Political attitudes are contested and polarized, but also dynamic, with potential for reform-driven change.

Cameroon

Nation-building approaches reinforce: Acceptance of centralized, dominant-party rule (among some Francophone groups), Resistance and alienation in Anglophone regions, Political apathy among youth and cynicism about meaningful democratic participation. **Result:** Political attitudes are more resigned compared to Nigeria, shaped by authoritarian political structures and conflict.

Overall Implications for Nation-Building

Nigeria

Must strengthen federalism, reduce corruption, and build inclusive institutions. Needs more equitable representation to reduce ethnic distrust. Youth engagement offers opportunities for constructive nation-building. Nation-building is possible but requires institutional reforms to overcome ethnic mistrust and governance failures.

JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)

Cameroon

Needs decentralization, inclusion of Anglophone grievances, and political liberalization. Trust cannot be rebuilt without addressing structural inequalities. Stabilizing conflict regions is essential for genuine participation and unity. Nation-building is severely constrained by authoritarian practices and unresolved identity conflicts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to Improve Political Trust

A. Strengthen Institutions and Reduce Corruption

Increase transparency in public budgeting (open budgets, citizen audits), Strengthen anti-corruption agencies and ensure their independence from executive influence. Enforce consequences for corruption and impunity to signal that institutions serve citizens, not elites.

B. Improve the Delivery of Public Services

Citizens' trust rises when government delivers reliable services—education, security, electricity, healthcare, water. Adopt citizen-feedback mechanisms (e.g., service scorecards) to improve state responsiveness.

C. Promote Judicial Independence

Better rule of law, fair trials, and independent courts reduce political grievances. Address human-rights abuses by security agencies to rebuild credibility in state authority.

Recommendations to Increase Citizen Participation

A. Strengthen Civic Education

Implement continuous civic education at schools and community levels. Educate citizens on voting, accountability, local governance structures, and peaceful political engagement.

B. Expand Youth Engagement Platforms

Nigeria and Cameroon have young populations; creating youth councils, digital feedback platforms, and mentorship programs increases participation. Support youth-led civic tech and advocacy groups.

C. Deepen Local Government Participation

Make town-hall meetings, participatory budgeting, and community development committees standard practice. Strengthen decentralization so local governments have real resources and authority.

D. Protect and Expand Civic Space

Allow civil-society organizations, journalists, and activists to operate freely without intimidation. Simplify NGO registration and protect rights to protests and public assembly.

Recommendations to Improve Political Attitudes (Efficacy, Tolerance, and Democratic Values)

A. Promote Inclusive Politics

Encourage political parties to adopt internal democracy, gender quotas, and youth quotas. Reduce ethnic, regional, and religious polarization by promoting cross-cutting coalitions.

B. Strengthen Media Literacy and Combat Misinformation

Train journalists in conflict-sensitive reporting. Implement media-literacy campaigns to help citizens identify misinformation.

C. Foster Dialogue and Conflict Resolution

In countries facing insecurity (Boko Haram in Nigeria, Anglophone crisis in Cameroon), peacebuilding programs significantly shape political attitudes. Support community dialogue sessions, cultural exchange programs, and reconciliation efforts.

D. Encourage Trust in Electoral Processes

Independent electoral commissions, transparent vote counting, and verifiable digital systems increase belief that participation matters. Election observers and civic-tech platforms (e.g., citizen reporting apps) enhance credibility

Conclusion

In both countries, nation-building continues to shape trust, participation, and political attitudes. Nigeria exhibits a more participatory but fragmented political culture while Cameroon shows a more controlled and polarized political environment with deep trust deficits. Effective nation-building will depend on inclusive governance, institutional reform, and addressing identity-based marginalization in both states.

Nigeria demonstrates high political awareness and active civic engagement, while Cameroon shows moderate awareness and limited participation. Both countries experience low trust in political institutions, though expressed differently: contestation in Nigeria, passive compliance in Cameroon. Citizens in both countries are dissatisfied with governance, yet

responses differ: Nigerians express critical engagement; Cameroonians display ambivalence. Support for democracy and pluralism exists in both contexts, highlighting shared aspirations for reform. Historical and cultural factors shape the observed patterns of engagement and trust.

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