

An Appraisal of Political Beliefs and Trust-in-Government Among Market Women in Marginalised Communities in Ondo City

Timilehin Olayinka OMONIYI¹ 

¹Department of Arts & Social Sciences
Education, Faculty of Education,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

Corresponding Author:

Timilehin Olayinka OMONIYI
E-mail: Timmylayinka@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Women's participation in Nigerian politics remains depressingly low, yet Nigeria's political history shows that market women have not always been silent political actors. The study, therefore, investigated an appraisal of political beliefs and trust in government among market women in marginalised communities in Ondo city. Previous studies have largely concentrated on women's empowerment and political interest, with little attention paid to the political beliefs and trust orientations of market women. The study adopted a descriptive research design, with 210 market women randomly selected as participants. Data were collected using the Political Belief Scale (PB, $r = 0.94$) and Trust-in-Government Scale (T-I-G, $r = 0.81$). Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Participants' mean age was 52 ± 1.05 years, and 21.1% were between 50–54 years of age. Results revealed a paradox: while political beliefs were high ($\bar{x} = 2.95$), trust in government was low ($\bar{x} = 2.47$), against the threshold of 2.5. These findings imply that although market women demonstrate strong political beliefs, their limited trust in government could hinder sustained participation in democratic governance. It is concluded that bridging this gap requires deliberate trust-building mechanisms. The study recommends the establishment of permanent liaison committees between local government councils and market associations (Iyalojas, cooperative leaders) to enable two-way communication on policy priorities, infrastructure needs, and market regulations.

KEYWORDS

Political Belief, Trust-in-Government, Market Women, Marginalised Communities

1. Introduction

In many of Nigeria's marginalised communities, the rhythms of daily trade and communal solidarity are sustained by women traders, yet these rhythms scarcely translate into meaningful trust in state institutions or vibrant political agency. These women, often referred to as market women, are more than economic actors; they are the lifeblood of local commerce and community cohesion, controlling food distribution, regulating trade, and managing informal credit networks through cooperative structures. Despite this central role, they are rarely acknowledged as political actors in governance structures and are frequently reduced to passive recipients of electoral mobilisation (Ariyo & Jerome, 2018). Their exclusion is not just a question of representation but one that speaks to deeper distortions in Nigeria's democratic fabric, raising critical concerns about legitimacy, inclusivity, and the responsiveness of governance to the needs of all citizens (Dulani, 2023; Nwagwu, Iwuala & Ebeh, 2024).



The paradox of market women's position is striking. They are visible in the economic sphere, arriving at markets before dawn and leaving only after dusk, yet they remain largely invisible in the corridors of political power.

Beneath the vibrancy of market trade lies a muted political undercurrent, shaped by decades of neglect, unmet promises, and transactional encounters with politicians whose engagements often end once elections are concluded (Obeta & Ihechituru, 2025). This dynamic sustains a cycle of distrust, where political beliefs about the importance of governance coexist with deep scepticism about the capacity or willingness of state institutions to respond meaningfully to citizens' needs (Abolade, 2021). Political beliefs are central to understanding this paradox. Defined as enduring orientations and convictions about governance, authority, and the role of citizens in public life, political beliefs shape how individuals interpret political processes and their place within them (Almond & Verba, 1963; Eze & Mark, 2024). These beliefs are cognitive, affective, and evaluative: they embody knowledge of political systems, emotional orientations toward political actors, and judgments about what governance should be (Gumbi & Baba, 2024). Importantly, political beliefs are not fixed traits but evolving constructs shaped by socialisation, historical experience, and personal encounters with institutions (Dalton, 2014).

They are significant predictors of participation, civic engagement, and voting behaviour (Hooghe, 2011). Among marginalised women, political beliefs are often simultaneously shaped by agency and constraint. Market women may hold strong convictions about the necessity of governance, taxation, and regulation, yet their lived experiences of exclusion limit opportunities for genuine political influence (Radnitz, 2021). For market women in Ondo, political beliefs are informed by a blend of historical exclusion, cultural narratives, and transactional political encounters. Marginalisation theory suggests that structural barriers such as patriarchal norms, economic vulnerability, and political invisibility combine to erode trust, even among those most dependent on stable governance. Their political orientations are thus not merely the product of personal experience but outcomes of entrenched gendered socialisation. Beliefs about governance are shaped less by abstract ideological loyalties and more by material concerns such as taxation rates, market levies, infrastructure provision, and security arrangements.

For many, politics is approached with a pragmatic, instrumentalist orientation, where politicians are judged based on tangible benefits delivered rather than party affiliation (Okeke, 2019; Chandra, 2004). At the same time, political beliefs are not devoid of normative content. Traders frequently articulate expectations of fairness, accountability, and protection from government, even when such expectations are repeatedly unmet. Community memory reinforces this sense of entitlement. Historic episodes such as the Aba Women's War of 1929 and local protests against unfair levies remain powerful narratives, reminding market women that they have historically played active roles in challenging unjust governance. Political socialisation within markets further strengthens these beliefs. Market associations, headed by leaders such as Iya-Olojas, serve as hubs of political discussion and information dissemination, particularly during elections. Religious institutions and family networks also contribute, ensuring that even women with limited formal education are exposed to political discourse in everyday settings.

While political beliefs reveal how market women perceive governance, the question of trust in government exposes how they evaluate it. Political trust refers to citizens' confidence in the fairness,

integrity, and competence of political institutions (Norris, 2011; Levi & Stoker, 2000). It encompasses expectations that government will act in the public's best interest and deliver services effectively (Zilincikova, 2020). Theories of political trust diverge between institutional performance perspectives, which stress service delivery and promise fulfilment as determinants of trust, and cultural approaches, which emphasise historical experience and norms (Hetherington, 2005; Oloruntoba, 2021). In many African contexts, including Nigeria, both perspectives are relevant: colonial legacies of extractive governance persist alongside contemporary failures of state responsiveness (Bratton, Mattes & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005; Logan, 2017). In Nigeria, trust in government has been persistently low. Corruption scandals, policy inconsistency, weak service delivery, and extractive taxation reinforce scepticism across both rural and urban populations (Ariyo & Jerome, 2018).

For market women, distrust is grounded in the everyday realities of “taxation without service.” Levies collected from traders rarely translate into improved stalls, sanitation, or security. Government presence is often limited to regulatory enforcement, with officials appearing to collect dues or enforce fines rather than to engage in meaningful dialogue. This asymmetry constructs government as an extractive entity, rather than a partner in community development (Ayo, Mbarika & Oni, 2015). Patterns of distrust are further shaped by political representation. While Iya-Oloja leaders act as intermediaries between traders and politicians, their endorsements are often mediated by partisan loyalties or personal patronage. When traders perceive that their leaders' decisions reflect self-interest rather than collective priorities, trust in both leadership and government erodes. This experience echoes findings across African markets where political brokerage reproduces cycles of exclusion rather than empowering grassroots voices (Chukwuma, Akinremi, Gyimah-Boadi, Bratton, Mattes, Logan & Dulani, 2015).

The consequences of low trust extend beyond scepticism. Disengagement from government consultations and resistance to regulations create a feedback loop in which limited participation hinders government understanding of community needs, further weakening trust. Yet, distrust does not always translate into apathy. Many market women remain politically attentive and actively critique governance, embodying what Norris (2011) describes as “critical citizenship.” They monitor political actions, hold discussions, and voice frustrations, even if they withdraw from formal engagement. This paradox illustrates how high political belief can coexist with low political trust—a dynamic central to this study. Cultural factors also play a significant role in shaping trust dynamics. In Yoruba political culture, trust is often personal and relational. Politicians who establish genuine connections with traders, attend market functions, or fulfil promises tend to command higher levels of trust, even when broader institutional confidence is low. However, such trust is fragile, frequently undermined by unmet expectations and inconsistent engagement.

Examples abound across Ondo: in Ilaje, decades of unfulfilled promises to improve transport infrastructure have left traders deeply sceptical, while in Akoko, repeated petitions for market renovations remain unanswered despite formal acknowledgments. Such experiences reinforce perceptions of government as distant and unresponsive. Moreover, gendered power relations within markets constrain women's autonomy in political participation. Male patrons and political godfathers often dominate decision-making, limiting the influence of women leaders. National-level initiatives such as the 35% affirmative action policy have had little impact at the grassroots, as they seldom address the everyday realities of marginalised women traders. Civic education interventions, often led by NGOs,

are typically short-term and fail to sustain changes in trust or political engagement. Consequently, market women's political socialisation remains largely shaped by informal networks and sporadic patronage, rather than by structured civic empowerment (Okeke, 2019).

The persistence of low trust has significant implications for democracy in Nigeria. When women who anchor local economies remain excluded from governance, democracy becomes less inclusive and representative. Marginalised communities, accustomed to self-reliance in the absence of state support, may internalise distrust as a survival strategy, further normalising disengagement from formal politics. This entrenched disconnection between citizen belief in governance and confidence in governors reflects a profound democratic gap. Against this backdrop, the appraisal of political beliefs and trust in government among market women in Ondo City becomes critical. This study responds to the gap in the literature, as few works have examined the lived political orientations of grassroots women despite their economic centrality. It also addresses a theoretical gap by integrating insights from political trust theory, gendered political socialisation, and marginalisation theory to explain how women's economic agency intersects with their political worldviews. Thus, focusing on a demographic that sustains communities economically yet remains politically marginal, the study highlights both the resilience and fragility of Nigeria's democratic processes.

1.1 Objective of the study

Generally, this study did an appraisal of political beliefs and trust-in-government among market women in marginalised communities in Ondo city. Particularly, this study will examine the following.

1. To ascertain market women's political belief
2. To investigate market women's trust in government

2. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design to investigate political beliefs and trust in government among market women in Ondo City, Nigeria. The target population comprised adult market women aged 18 years and above who were actively trading at least three days per week. A multi-stage stratified purposive sampling technique was adopted to ensure systematic and context-sensitive representation of the study population. The study area covered major trading hubs in Ondo West and Ondo East Local Government Areas of Ondo State, spanning both urban and peri-urban communities. At the first stage, the LGAs were stratified into four market clusters based on contextual characteristics such as market size and footfall, location and ward dispersion, and the degree of formal organisation. From each stratum, two markets were purposively selected using criteria of trading volume, safety and accessibility, and the presence of recognised traders' associations, yielding a total of eight markets. At the final stage, 210 market women were proportionately allocated to the eight markets according to relative market size. Within each market, participants were approached through a stall-intercept strategy during peak trading hours, ensuring diversity in terms of product lines, trading experience, and socio-demographic characteristics.

Data were collected using two validated structured scales. The Political Belief Scale (PBS; reliability coefficient $r = 0.94$) and the Trust-in-Government Scale (TIG; $r = 0.81$) were administered in interviewer-assisted format to accommodate literacy variations among respondents. Both instruments were based on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The data

collection process took place over a six-week period between January and February, 2025, and respondents were given sufficient explanation regarding the purpose and voluntary nature of the study. The overall response rate was 96%, with minimal non-response due to the accessibility of participants within the market environment. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Department Quality Assurance on Research, and permission was also secured from market associations and local government authorities before data collection. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was assured by anonymising data. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and percentages) to summarise participants' political beliefs and trust in government.

3. Results

Research question 1: What is the level of market women political beliefs?

Table 1: Mean response of market women political beliefs

Sn	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	Std.
1	The government should provide more support for women's businesses.	110 52.6	69 33.0	24 11.5	6 2.9	3.35	.79602
2	Market women should prioritize economic empowerment over political engagement.	97 46.4	63 30.1	29 13.9	20 9.6	3.13	.98608
3	The current political system represents the interests of market women.	92 44.0	48 23.0	36 17.2	33 15.8	2.95	1.11700
4	Women's participation in politics is essential for gender equality.	83 39.7	78 37.3	27 12.9	21 10.0	3.07	.96342
5	Market women should focus on their businesses rather than politics.	93 44.5	56 26.8	26 12.4	34 16.3	2.99	1.10722
6	The government should increase funding for women's empowerment programs.	120 57.4	65 31.1	15 7.2	9 4.3	3.42	.80499
7	Market women's associations should be involved in political decision-making.	61 29.2	75 35.9	57 27.3	16 7.7	2.87	.92572
8	Political leaders understand the needs of market women.	90 43.1	75 35.9	30 14.4	14 6.7	3.15	.90697
9	Market women should support female political candidates.	77 36.8	49 23.4	48 23.0	35 16.7	2.80	1.11147
10	The political system is fair and just for market women.	83 39.7	50 23.9	43 20.6	33 15.8	2.88	1.10672
11	Market women's political engagement can bring about social change.	93 44.5	60 28.7	34 16.3	22 10.5	3.07	1.01414
12	Women's political participation is crucial for democracy.	83 39.7	65 31.1	27 12.9	34 16.3	2.94	1.08599
13	Market women should prioritize collective action over individual success.	86 41.1	56 26.8	41 19.6	26 12.4	2.97	1.05330
14	The government should provide training for market women in politics.	71 34.0	70 33.5	42 20.1	26 12.4	2.89	1.01543
15	Market women's political beliefs align with their business interests.	27 12.9	49 23.4	104 49.8	29 13.9	2.35	.87651
16	Political engagement is essential for market women's empowerment.	94 45.0	51 24.4	35 16.7	29 13.9	3.01	1.08529
17	Market women should support policies promoting gender equality.	87 41.6	52 24.9	46 22.0	24 11.5	2.97	1.04873

18	The political system needs to be changed to benefit market women.	56 26.8	60 28.7	56 26.8	37 17.7	2.65	1.06020
19	Market women's political participation can improve their socio-economic status.	89 42.6	63 30.1	28 13.4	29 13.9	3.01	1.05829
20	Market women should engage in politics.	60 28.7	40 19.1	65 31.1	44 21.1	2.56	1.11721
Weighted Average: 2.95. Threshold: 2.5							
SA: Strongly Agree A: Agree D: Disagree SD : Strongly Disagree							

Table 1 revealed the mean response of market women political beliefs. It has a weighted average of 2.95 as against the threshold of 2.5. By implication, market women political beliefs.

Research question 2: What is the level of market women trust in government?

Table 2: Mean response of market women's trust in government

Sn	Items	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	Std.
1	I trust the government to protect my business interests.	12 5.8	108 51.9	78 37.5	10 4.8	2.60	.722
2	The government is responsive to the needs of market women.	3 1.4	3 1.4	107 51.4	95 45.7	1.59	.600
3	I believe the government has market women's best interests at heart.	2 1.0	2 1.0	24 11.5	180 86.5	1.16	.463
4	The government is transparent in its dealings with market women.	43 20.7	113 54.3	42 20.2	10 4.8	2.91	.772
5	I trust government officials to keep their promises.	66 31.7	76 36.5	55 26.4	11 5.3	2.95	.891
6	The government provides adequate support for market women's businesses.	33 15.9	34 16.3	82 39.4	59 28.4	2.20	1.024
7	I feel confident in the government's ability to address market women's concerns.	47 22.6	110 52.9	41 19.7	10 4.8	2.93	.783
8	The government is fair in its treatment of market women.	56 26.9	83 39.9	53 25.5	16 7.7	2.86	.903
9	I trust the government to provide accurate information.	56 26.9	111 53.4	28 13.5	13 6.3	3.01	.811
10	The government prioritizes market women's needs over other groups.	40 19.2	95 45.7	59 28.4	14 6.7	2.77	.835
11	I believe the government is committed to empowering market women.	52 25.0	79 38.0	55 26.1	22 10.6	2.77	.944
12	The government is accountable to market women.	31 14.9	43 20.7	97 46.6	37 17.8	2.33	.937
13	I trust government policies to benefit market women.	38 18.3	39 18.8	84 40.4	47 22.6	2.33	1.021
14	The government values market women's contributions to the economy.	53 25.5	106 51.0	33 15.9	16 7.7	2.94	.849
15	I feel heard by the government as a market woman.	33 15.9	40 19.2	79 38.0	56 26.9	2.24	1.021
16	The government addresses market women's grievances effectively.	44 21.2	56 26.9	78 37.5	30 14.4	2.55	.982
17	I trust the government to protect market women's rights.	35 16.8	63 30.3	63 30.3	47 22.6	2.41	1.018

18	The government provides equal opportunities for market women.	30 14.4	23 11.1	84 40.4	71 34.1	2.06	1.015
19	I believe the government understands market women's challenges.	44 21.2	82 39.4	47 22.6	35 16.8	2.65	.996
20	The government is committed to improving market women's lives.	30 14.4	37 14.4	84 10.4	57 27.4	2.19	.998
Weighted Average: 2.47. Threshold: 2.5							
SA: Strongly Agree A: Agree D: Disagree SD : Strongly Disagree							

Table 2 revealed the mean response of market women trust in government. It has a weighted average of 2.47 as against the threshold of 2.5. By implication, market women demonstrate average trust in government.

4. Discussion

4.1 Market Women's Political Beliefs

The finding that market women in marginalised communities of Ondo exhibit high political beliefs suggests that they possess a strong awareness of, and orientation toward, political processes, governance structures, and the role of citizens in shaping public life. Political beliefs, as conceptualised by Dalton (2014), are cognitive and normative frameworks through which individuals interpret political realities, assign meaning to political events, and decide their own role in civic life. In the context of these market women, the presence of high political beliefs indicates that despite socio-economic constraints, their exposure to political discourse, lived experiences with governance outcomes, and interpersonal socialisation have cultivated a clear sense of political identity. The high political beliefs observed align with prior studies in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa that show that political marginalisation does not necessarily equate to political ignorance (Zilincikova, 2020).

On the contrary, those living in politically neglected spaces often develop acute political perceptions because governance failures directly and visibly affect their daily lives. Market women's livelihoods are intimately tied to government policies on taxation, market infrastructure, transport, and security. This daily proximity to policy effects fosters persistent engagement with political ideas, even in the absence of formal participation. Political beliefs among these women are also shaped by social networks within the market environment, where informal political discussions occur organically in trading stalls, cooperative meetings, and association gatherings. These networks act as informal civic education, consistent with Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's (1995) observation that political knowledge is often socially transmitted through routine interactions. The cultural institution of the *Iya-oloja* further reinforces this, as leaders often serve as conduits of political information from politicians to traders, even if mediated by patronage.

However, the findings suggest that these political beliefs are largely cognitive rather than behavioural. While women demonstrate strong opinions about governance and awareness of political structures, this does not always translate into direct political engagement such as lobbying for market improvements or participating consistently in civic platforms. This reflects Almond and Verba's (1963) description of a parochial-participant political culture, where citizens hold political opinions but engage selectively. Importantly, the finding resonates with political efficacy literature. Internal efficacy which is a belief in one's own ability to understand and engage with politics which appears relatively strong, while external efficacy, is a belief that government will respond to citizen demands, is weaker, as

corroborated by low trust levels. In this sense, high political beliefs among these women represent a latent resource for future mobilisation, one that could be harnessed through inclusive strategies that link political awareness to actual decision-making opportunities.

The implications for political mobilisation are particularly important. The high level of political consciousness among market women suggests that strategies for women's empowerment in marginalised communities should not begin with awareness creation, but with pathways that transform awareness into collective action. Market associations could serve as platforms for sustained mobilisation, where traders are encouraged to channel their strong political beliefs into advocacy for improved infrastructure, transparent taxation, and better representation. If supported by responsive governance, the existing political consciousness of these women could become a powerful driver of grassroots mobilisation and democratic participation.

4.2 Market Women's Trust in Government

The finding of low trust in government among market women reflects deep-seated scepticism toward political institutions and actors. Political trust, as conceptualised by Levi and Stoker (2000) in (Oloruntoba, 2021), is the belief that government will act in the citizen's interest and adhere to principles of fairness and competence. The observed deficit in trust here is significant, as it undermines the capacity of democratic institutions to secure legitimacy and foster cooperation among citizens. This distrust is not unique to Ondo's marginalised market women; it mirrors national trends. Afrobarometer (2022) data show that trust in Nigeria's federal government, local government councils, and political parties is consistently low, with women—especially in rural or economically disadvantaged contexts—expressing even greater scepticism than men. However, the reasons for this distrust are highly contextual. For these market women, distrust is rooted in lived experience.

Many reported that government engagement is largely limited to revenue collection, enforcement of levies, and pre-election political mobilisation. Promises of improved market infrastructure, reduced levies, or access to microcredit are often made but rarely fulfilled. This aligns with findings by Okeke (2019), who noted that political promises in market contexts are frequently transactional and short-term, eroding confidence over time. Low trust is also shaped by the perceived extractive nature of government-market relations. Traders view government officials as regulators and enforcers, not as partners in market development. Levy collection, for example, is often seen as a one-way transaction, with no visible reinvestment into market facilities. This perception resonates with the “taxation without services” critique common in African political economy literature (Obeta & Ihechituru, 2025). The distrust is compounded by structural barriers to representation. While *Iya-oloja* leaders may have contact with local politicians, these relationships are often mediated by political patronage and not always transparent to the wider market community.

As a result, market women perceive decision-making as distant, elite-controlled, and unaccountable. From a theoretical perspective, the low trust finding can be interpreted through the lens of institutional performance theory (Levi & Stoker, 2000), which posits that citizens' trust is strongly influenced by their evaluation of institutional performance. In this case, persistent underperformance in delivering promised market improvements, combined with the absence of participatory governance mechanisms, reinforces distrust. The consequences of low trust are far-reaching. Trust is the lubricant of democratic systems—it facilitates compliance with regulations, willingness to cooperate with

authorities, and openness to policy reforms. In its absence, citizens may withdraw from political processes, resist government initiatives, or engage only in short-term, transactional interactions. For market women, low trust could translate into reduced willingness to participate in formal consultation processes, reluctance to support government-led development schemes, and increased reliance on informal networks for problem-solving.

The coexistence of high political beliefs with low trust reveals a form of critical citizenship (Norris, 2011), where citizens are politically aware and evaluative, but sceptical of current governance performance. This duality has important implications. On one hand, it provides a foundation for mobilisation, as politically conscious citizens are more likely to demand accountability and reform. On the other hand, persistent low trust can deepen cynicism and disengagement if reforms are not forthcoming. Mobilisation strategies for market women, therefore, must prioritise restoring trust through visible responsiveness. Transparent reinvestment of levies into market facilities, regular consultative forums between councils and market associations, and accountability mechanisms could help rebuild confidence.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limits of this study. The reliance on self-reported measures of political beliefs and trust introduces the possibility of respondent bias, as women may have overstated their political awareness or understated their trust due to social desirability pressures. Moreover, the cross-sectional nature of the data only provides a snapshot, which may shift with election cycles or changing government performance. Future research should therefore employ longitudinal and mixed methods approaches to capture evolving perceptions and mitigate self-reporting biases.

5. Conclusion

The study's findings present a nuanced portrait of political consciousness among market women in marginalised communities in Ondo. On one hand, these women demonstrate high political beliefs—reflecting a strong awareness of governance processes, informed opinions on political actors, and an enduring sense of the importance of political participation. On the other, they exhibit low trust in government, signaling a lack of confidence in political institutions' willingness or capacity to act in their interest. The co-occurrence of these two findings suggests that political disconnection in these communities is not rooted in apathy or ignorance. Rather, it emerges from a lived dissonance between political understanding and governance reality. Market women clearly see the relevance of politics to their daily lives, yet their repeated encounters with unfulfilled promises, extractive government practices, and absence of meaningful consultation undermine their willingness to trust official structures.

This dynamic aligns with broader Nigerian and African patterns where citizens, particularly in marginalised or rural settings, engage critically with politics but do so from a position of guarded scepticism. The result is a form of citizenship that is active in thought but cautious in practice—a stance that preserves political awareness but limits collaborative governance. Importantly, the high political beliefs evident among these women constitute a latent civic resource. They indicate that the foundational orientation toward political engagement exists and could be mobilised toward more active participation if institutional trust were strengthened. Efforts to rebuild trust must therefore focus not on generating political interest, but on demonstrating consistent, tangible responsiveness from government actors. Low trust, if unaddressed, risks entrenching a cycle of disengagement. When

citizens perceive government as unresponsive or self-serving, they are less likely to participate in formal processes, which in turn reduces the pressure on institutions to be accountable.

Breaking this cycle requires deliberate policy design: creating continuous channels for dialogue, ensuring transparency in resource use, and integrating market women directly into decision-making about the spaces and systems that shape their livelihoods. In theoretical terms, these findings reinforce the importance of distinguishing between political beliefs and political trust. While both are central to democratic health, they are shaped by different processes, and beliefs are often rooted in socialisation and identity, whereas trust is contingent on performance and reciprocity. Thus, recognising this distinction is critical for policymakers seeking to engage communities that are politically aware but institutionally sceptical. Ultimately, this study's results underscore the resilience of political consciousness among even the most economically and politically marginalised. They also serve as a caution: without credible, sustained engagement from government, high political beliefs may not translate into constructive participation but may instead harden into persistent distrust, a condition that weakens the democratic fabric.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made

1. Establish permanent liaison committees between local government councils and market associations (Iyalojas, cooperative leaders) to enable two-way communication on policy priorities, infrastructure needs, and market regulations. This regular, non-electoral interaction can demonstrate responsiveness and gradually rebuild trust.
2. Involve market women directly in planning and monitoring projects that affect their trading environment—such as stall renovations, sanitation facilities, and transportation access. Co-design ensures transparency in resource allocation, aligns interventions with real needs, and makes government performance more visible.
3. Introduce simple, accessible feedback and grievance-redress systems within markets (e.g., suggestion boxes, monthly issue-tracking boards) managed jointly by market leaders and government representatives. These mechanisms provide visible evidence of responsiveness and counter perceptions of neglect.
4. Pair civic education programmes with tangible economic benefits such as microcredit schemes, tax relief for compliant traders, or cooperative grants. Linking political engagement with concrete, delivered benefits can strengthen the perception that political participation leads to meaningful outcomes, bridging the trust gap.

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