

**BASELINE STUDY ON CIVIC PARTICIPATION, INCLUSIVE REPRESENTATION,
AND POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG WOMEN, YOUTH,
AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN ANAMBRA AND IMO STATES**

IMPLEMENTED BY



SUB-GRANTED BY
NIGERIA CIVIL SOCIETY SITUATION ROOM

FUNDED BY
**FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE
(FCDO), UNITED KINGDOM**

OCTOBER 2025
ANAMBRA AND IMO STATES, NIGERIA



Baseline Study on Civic Participation, Inclusive Representation, and Political Awareness among Women, Youth, and Persons with Disabilities in Anambra and Imo States

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DISCLAIMER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Project IMPACT Baseline Study exposes the deep-rooted socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers that have systematically excluded women, youths, and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) from active political participation and elective leadership in Anambra State. This exclusion has not only weakened democratic representation but has also contributed significantly to the state's chronic voter apathy, exemplified by the historically low 10% voter turnout in the 2021 off-cycle governorship election—the lowest in Nigeria's electoral history.

Despite this, 62% of surveyed respondents self-reported that they voted in that same election, suggesting that official turnout figures may not fully reflect self-perceived participation. Disaggregated data reveal that 62% of women, 58% of PWDs, and 52% of youths claimed to have voted. Among those who abstained, many cited distance to polling units, lack of registration, or disinterest. The findings underscore the urgent need for inclusive voter education, improved polling accessibility, security assurances, and transparent electoral processes.

When it comes to contesting for elective positions, participation remains alarmingly low. Only 11% of total respondents have ever considered running for office, with interest notably higher among PWDs (25%) than women and youths (15% each). However, overwhelming majorities—93% of women, 94% of youths, and 75% of PWDs—expressed no ambition to contest in the future. Key deterrents include the patriarchal nature of society, financial constraints, sexual harassment, family discouragement, political godfatherism, and systemic bias. Across all demographics, finance ranked as the number one barrier to political ambition.

In market politics, where women and youths often play visible roles, 65% of traders belong to market associations, yet barriers persist. Although 63% report no formal restrictions against women, youths, or PWDs in market bye-laws, entrenched gender bias, stigma, high campaign costs, and limited awareness continue to restrict participation. A majority of women (60%), youths (47%), and PWDs (43%) indicated willingness to contest for market leadership if these barriers were addressed.

Awareness of the Special Seats Bill—a progressive legislative effort to ensure reserved representation for women—was strikingly low: only 25% of respondents had heard of it. Nevertheless, 52% of respondents in Anambra and 88% in Imo State agreed that the bill is justified and would enhance political inclusion. Traditional leaders interviewed also expressed strong support, emphasizing sustained advocacy and strategic dialogue as key to the bill's success.

The study also highlights misinformation as a critical factor influencing electoral participation. While 89% of respondents do not believe everything they read on social media, 41% admitted they cannot distinguish between fake and credible news, and 56% lack knowledge of how to counter misinformation. Both quantitative and qualitative findings confirm that fake news significantly contributed to voter apathy in the 2021 election, underscoring the need for robust media literacy and fact-checking mechanisms.

The recommendations emerging from the study call for deliberate, structural reforms that transcend token advocacy. These include:

- Dismantling cultural barriers through traditional and religious leadership engagement.
- Re-orienting women, youths, and PWDs to see themselves as legitimate political actors.
- Institutionalizing inclusive budgeting and mandatory quotas for underrepresented groups.
- Legislating affordable nomination forms and empowering INEC to enforce compliance.
- Ensuring polling accessibility through universal design and mobile voting options.
- Establishing an Election Inclusion Monitoring Unit to track and publish inclusion indicators.
- Integrating media literacy into school curricula and community education systems.

Overall, the Project IMPACT Baseline Study concludes that exclusion in Anambra politics is not due to incompetence or apathy, but to systemic gatekeeping that has normalized inequity. Unless deliberate, legislative, and cultural shifts are urgently pursued to make politics inclusive, accessible, and less monetized, the state risks perpetuating low voter participation and the continued marginalization of women, youths, and PWDs.

This is a defining moment for Anambra State and Nigeria at large, a chance to transform inclusion from rhetoric into measurable action. True democracy cannot thrive when large segments of the population remain unseen, unheard, and unrepresented.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The baseline study adopted a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate both statistical evidence and contextual insights. The quantitative component captured the perceptions and experiences of women, youth, and persons with disabilities (PWDs) regarding political participation and inclusion in governance, while the qualitative component provided deeper understanding through stakeholder validation sessions and key informant interviews.

Data collection was conducted across Anambra State for all thematic components and in Imo State for the Special Seats Bill advocacy component only. Fieldwork took place between September and November 2025.

Sampling and Participants

The study employed purposive and convenience sampling techniques, selecting respondents who met specific inclusion criteria—particularly women, youth, and PWDs—while also including male participants to provide comparative insights on civic engagement patterns.

In Anambra State, data were collected from 15 structured markets (five per senatorial zone), representing major hubs of social and economic activity where civic engagement naturally occurs. This market-based approach was chosen because a significant proportion of Anambra's population, especially women and young people, are engaged in trade-related occupations.

A total of 2,055 responses were recorded in Anambra, including 1,708 via KoboCollect (enumerator-administered surveys) and 347 via Google Forms (self-administered surveys). In Imo State, 100 responses were obtained, focusing exclusively on perceptions around the Special Seats Bill.

Data Collection Tools and Process

Data were collected using two digital platforms—KoboCollect for field-based enumerators and Google Forms for remote respondents. Enumerators were trained on ethical interviewing, data entry, and disability-sensitive approaches prior to field deployment.

Given the infrastructural barriers faced by PWDs in market environments, the Google Form provided an alternative avenue for participation, allowing respondents to contribute from the comfort of their homes.

Qualitative data were gathered through key informant interviews (KIIs) and a validation meeting involving CSOs, media actors, government officials (including the Anambra State Commissioner for Information), and academic representatives. Stakeholders recommended that future studies should include groups such as widows, single mothers, pregnant women, and women with disabilities.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were cleaned and analyzed using Microsoft Excel, employing descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages. Charts and graphs were generated to visualize key findings across demographic variables.

Qualitative data from validation sessions and interviews were transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed to complement and contextualize quantitative findings.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents provided informed consent prior to participation. The introduction section of each data collection tool served as a digital consent form. Participants were assured of confidentiality and informed that their responses would be used solely for research and reporting purposes.

Limitations

The study encountered challenges in capturing adequate responses from persons with disabilities within market spaces due to infrastructural exclusion, including limited accessibility. However, this gap was partially mitigated by the use of online tools, which enabled some PWD respondents to participate remotely.

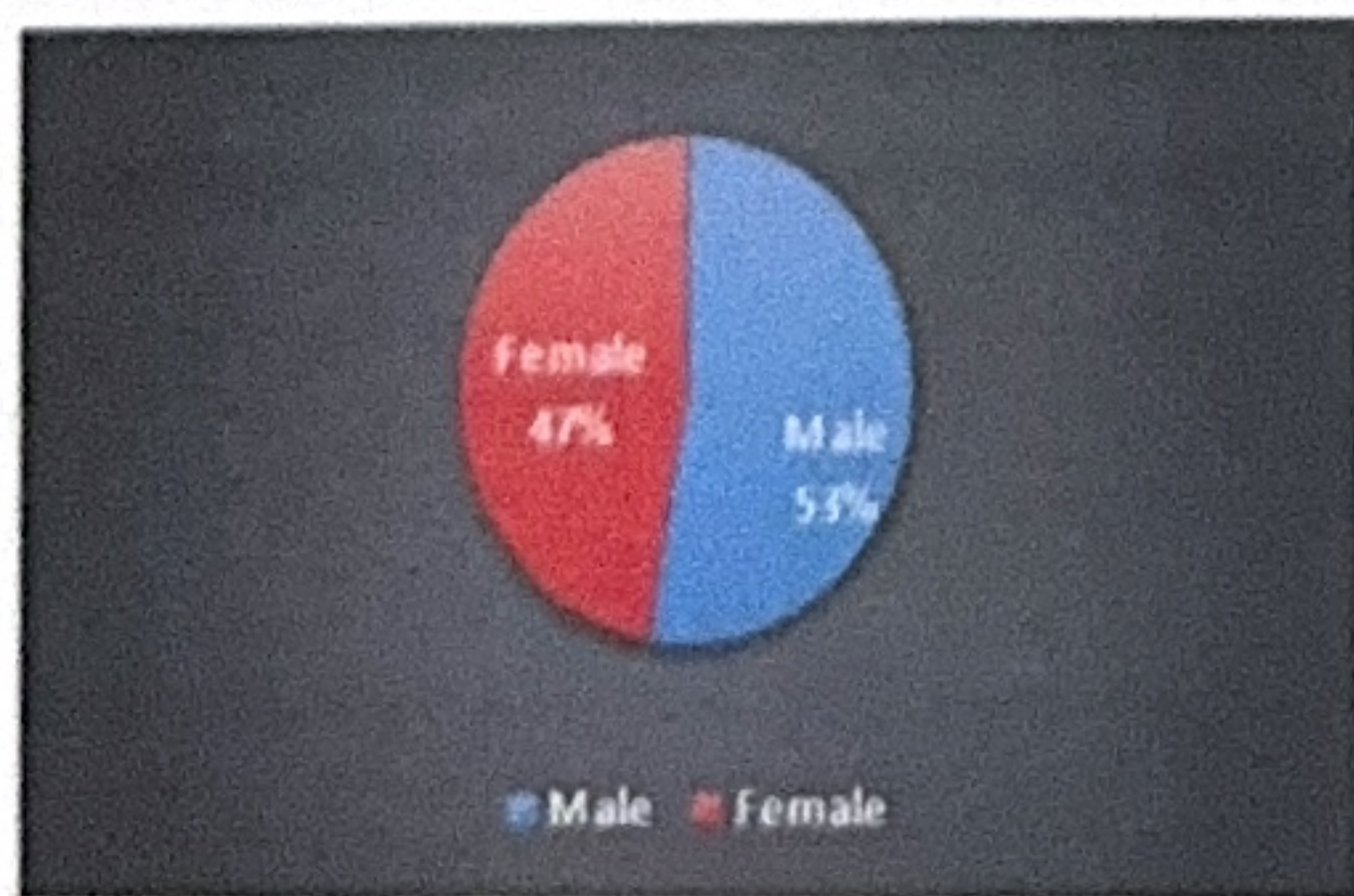
Data Quality Assurance

To ensure data integrity, the research team conducted routine verification of submitted responses, cross-checked inconsistencies, and removed duplicates prior to analysis. All data were securely stored and handled in line with research ethics and digital data protection standards.

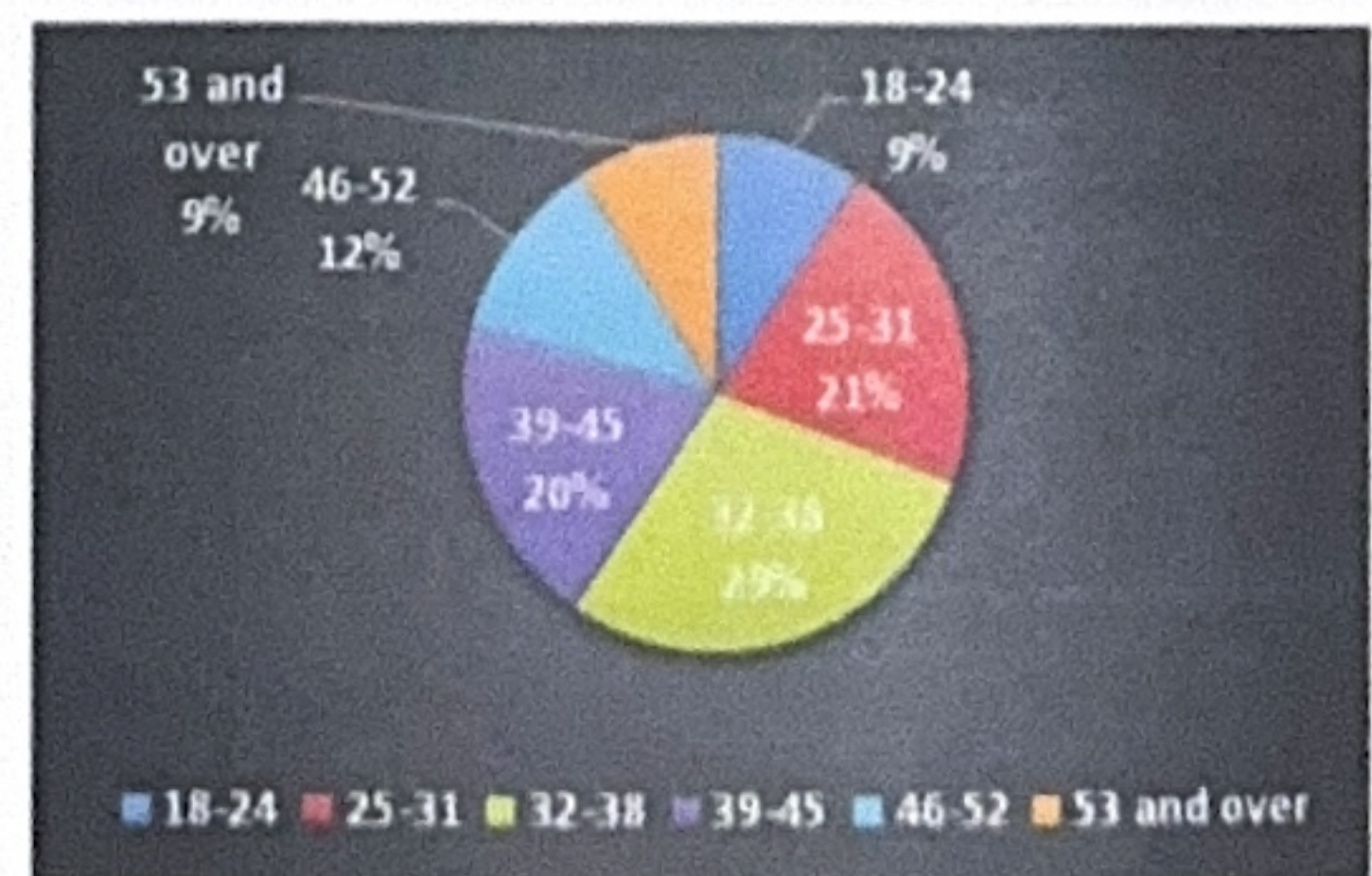
DEMOGRAPHICS

Respondents: 2155

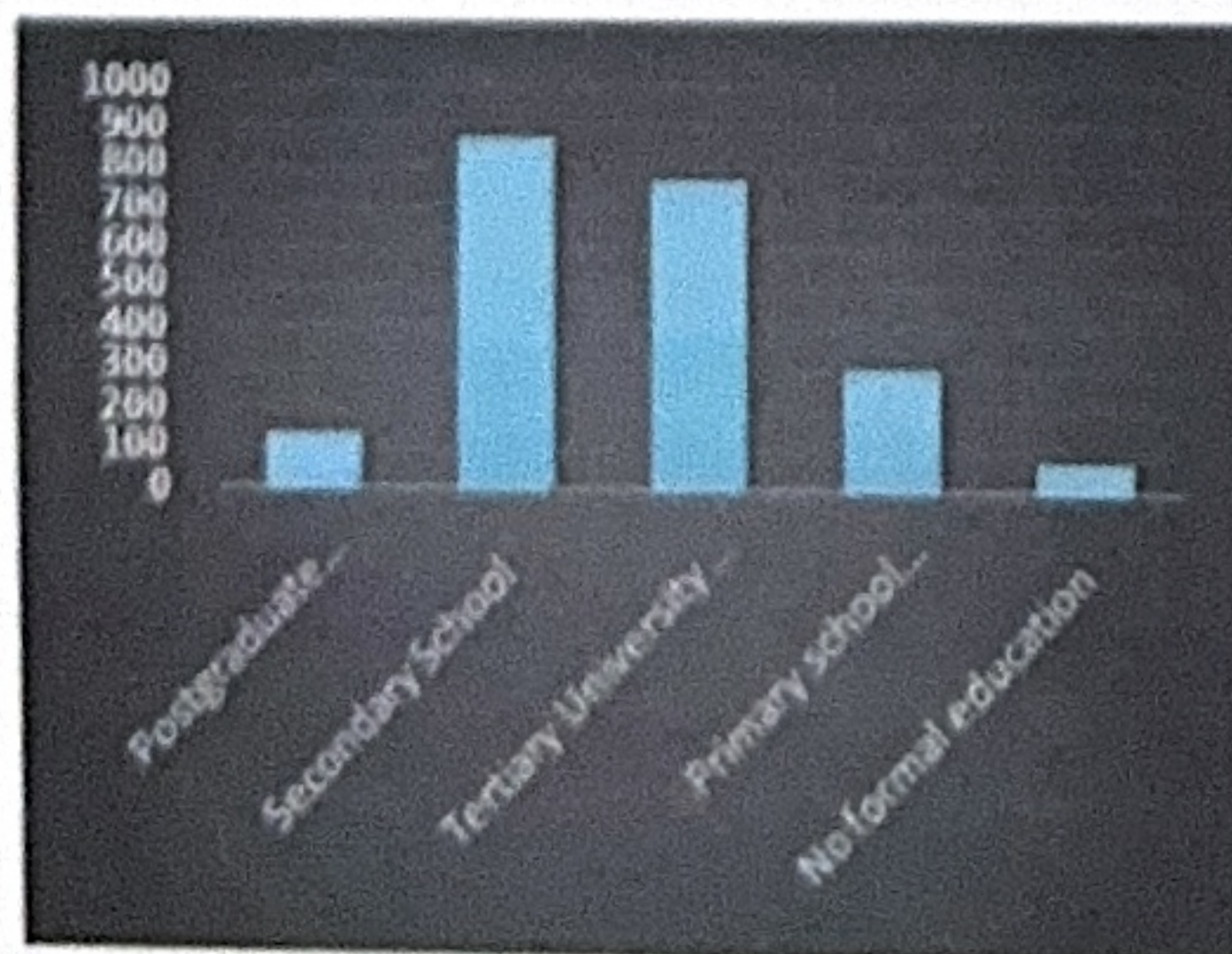
Gender



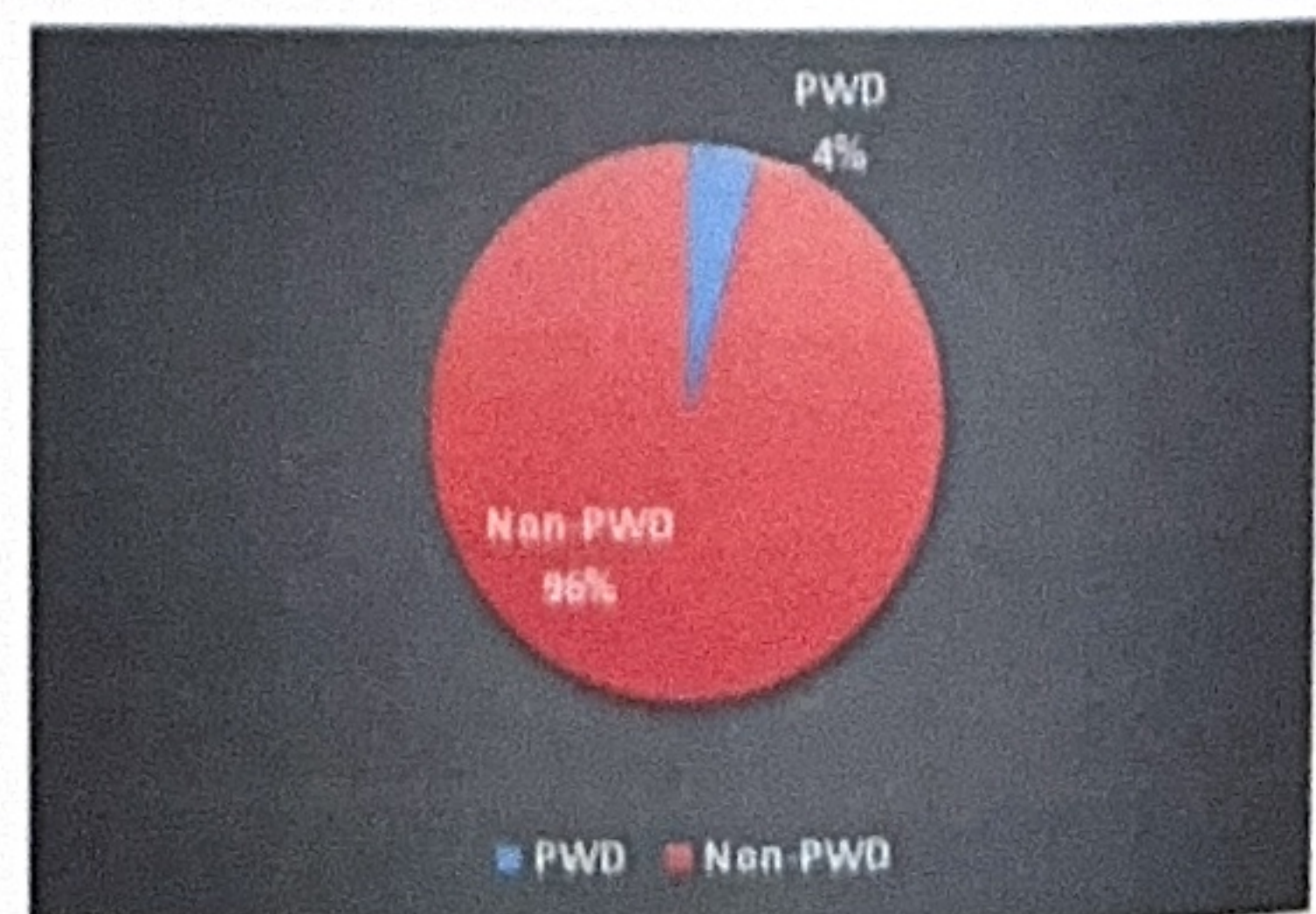
Age group



Educational Status



Disability Status

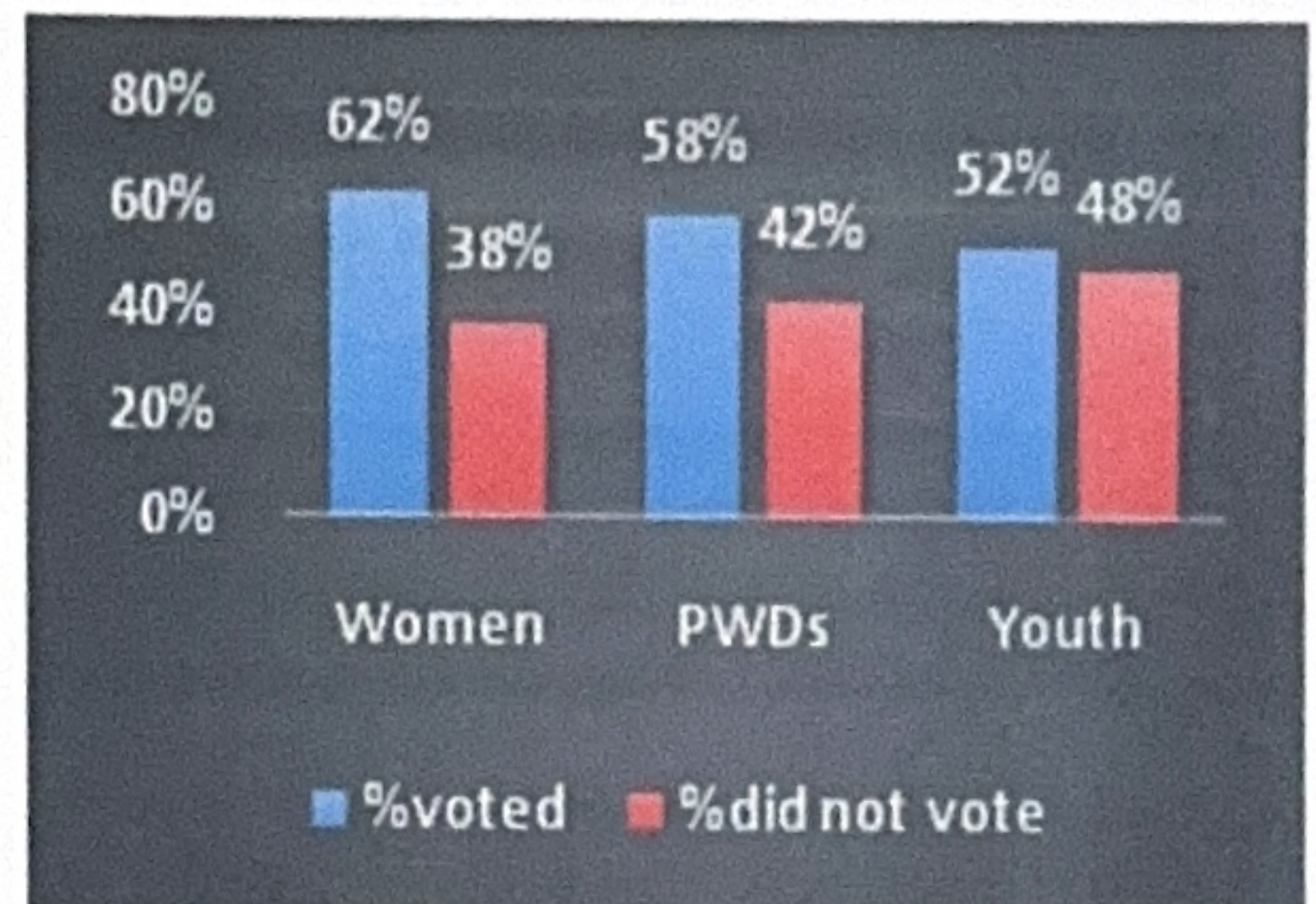


ELECTION PARTICIPATION

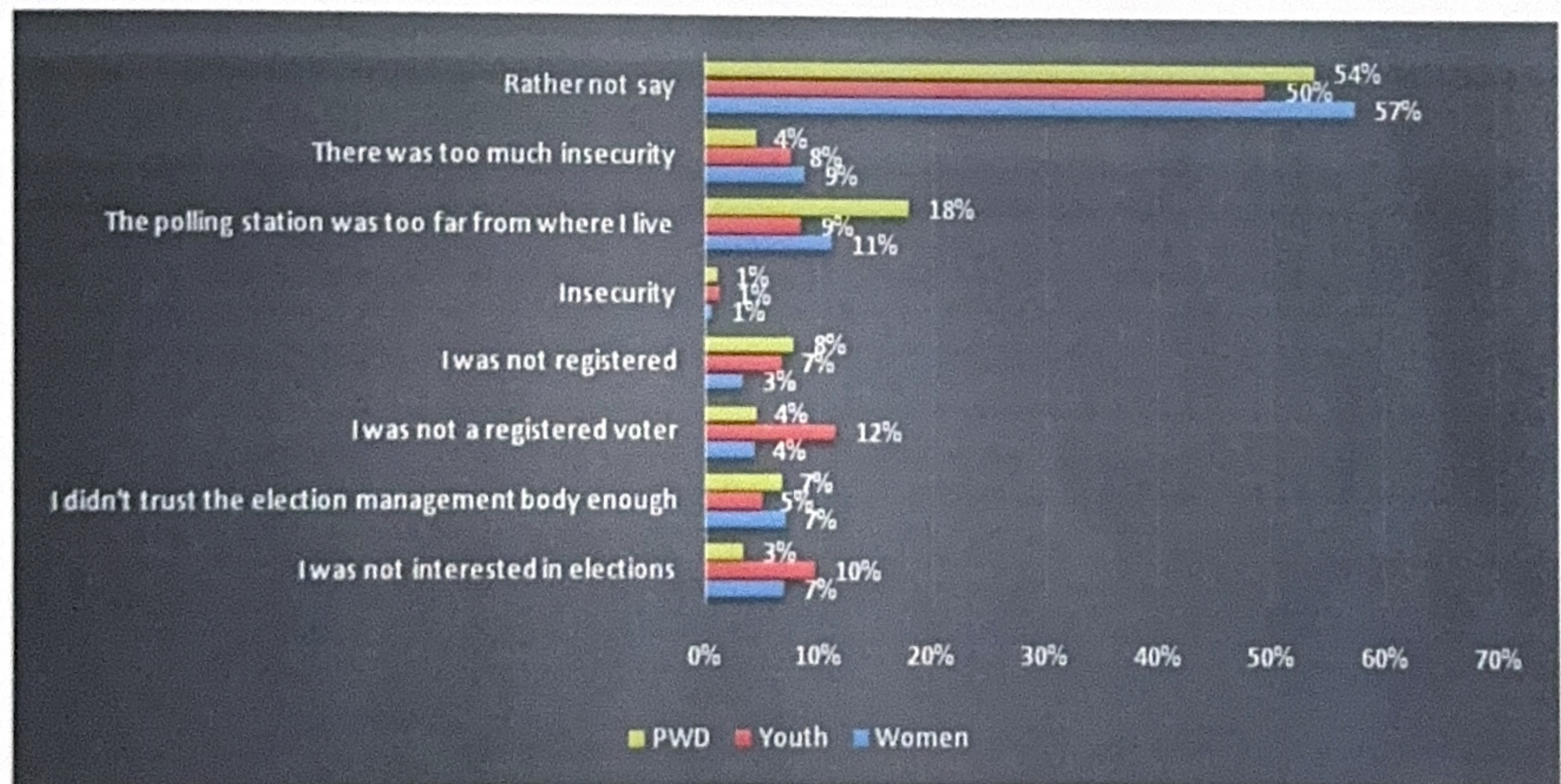
DID YOU VOTE DURING THE LAST GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION



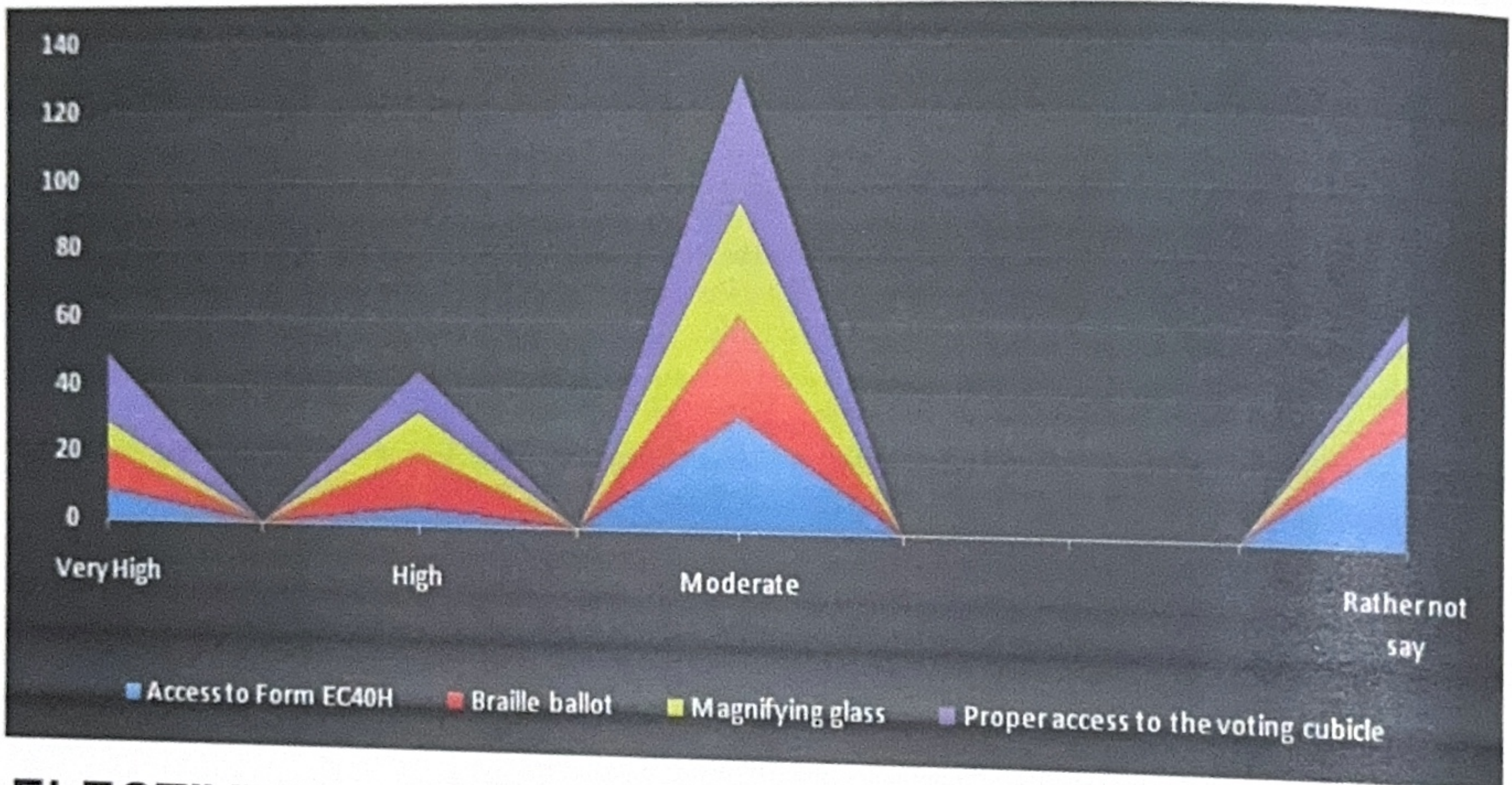
Disaggregated Responses by Key Demographics
(Women, Youth, PWDs)



If No, which of the following best describes your reason for not voting?



As a person with disability, kindly rate the underlisted in order of their severity (Very High, High, Moderate, Low, Very Low)

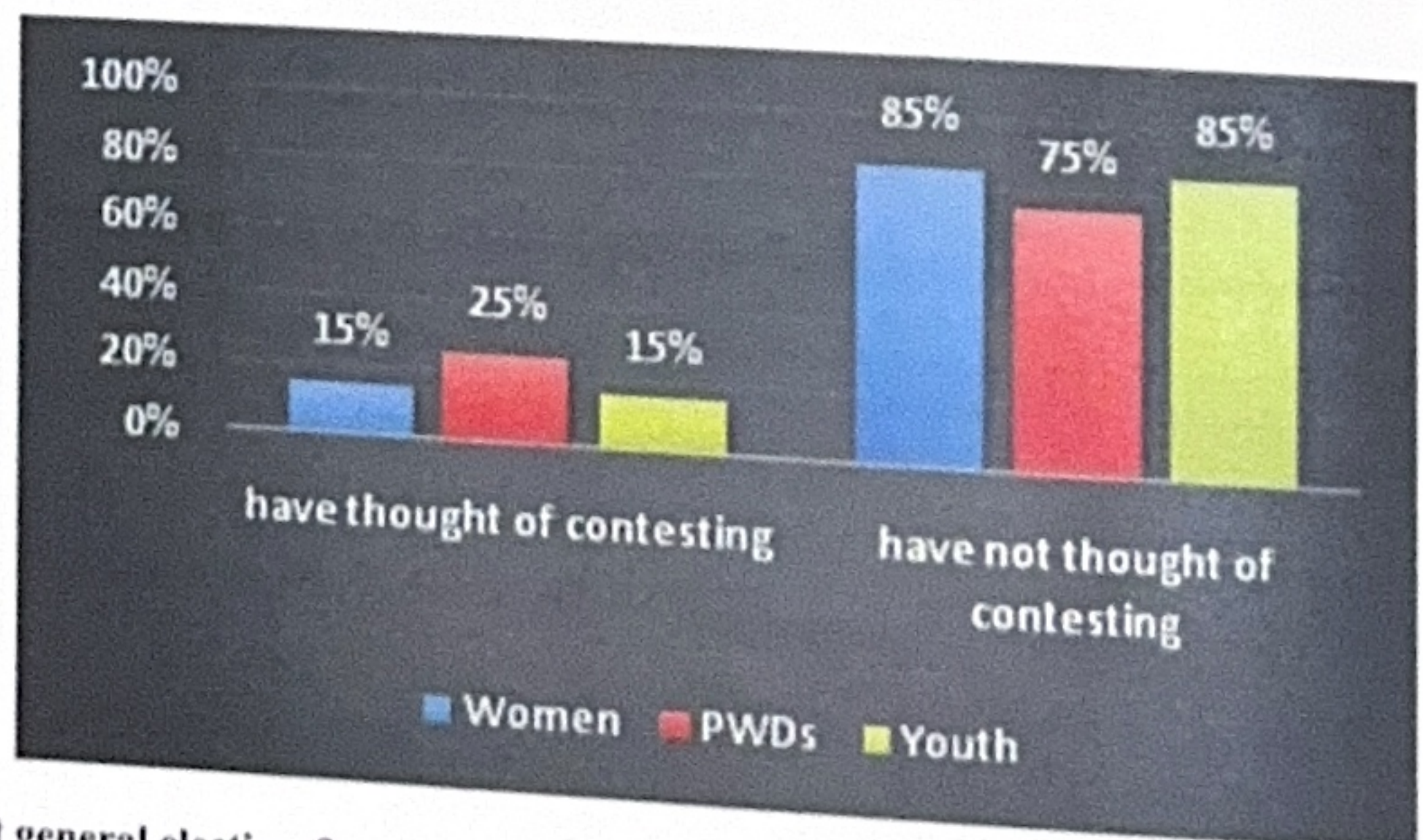


ELECTIVE POSITION

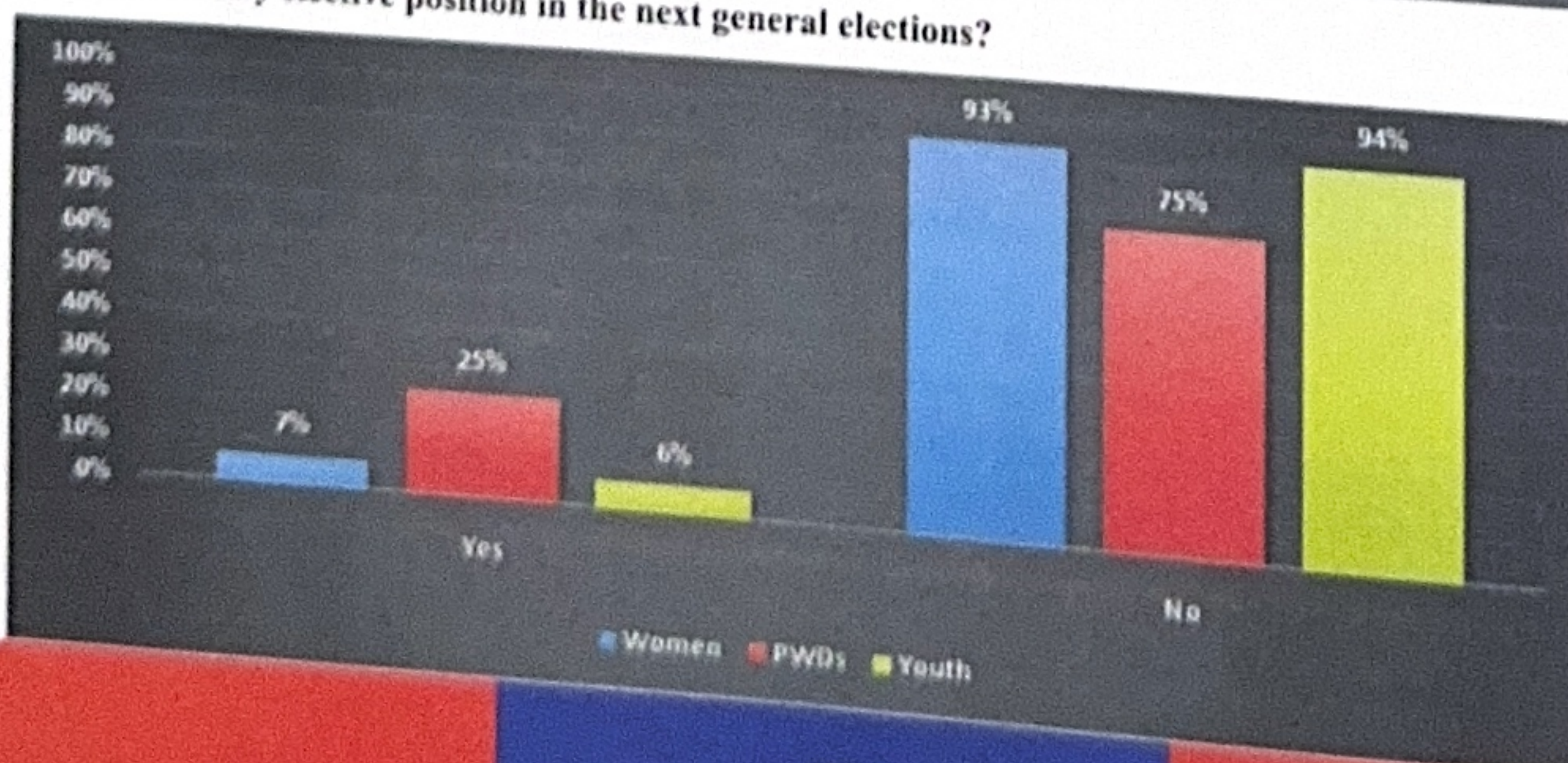
Have you ever thought of contesting for any elective positions?



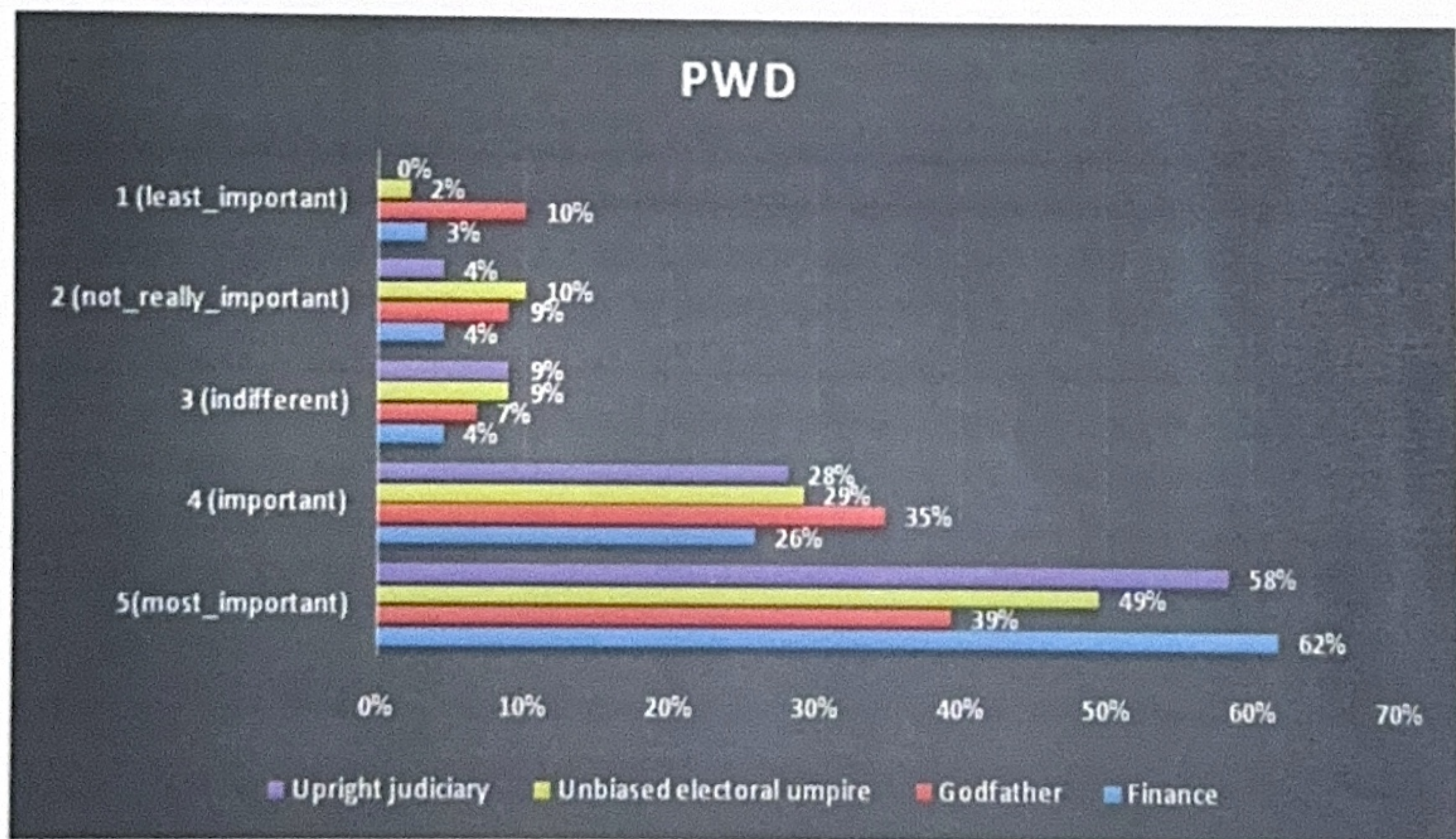
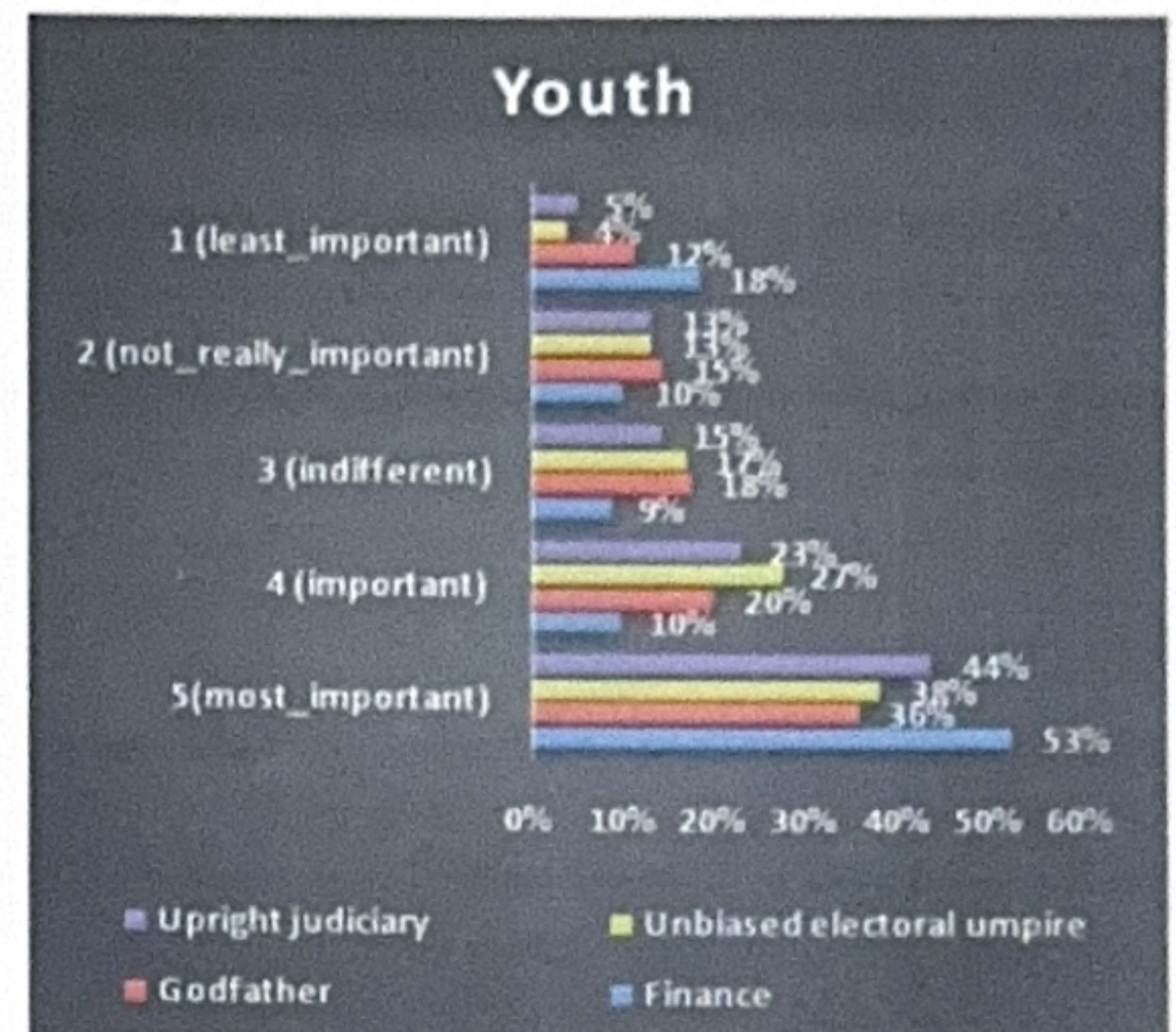
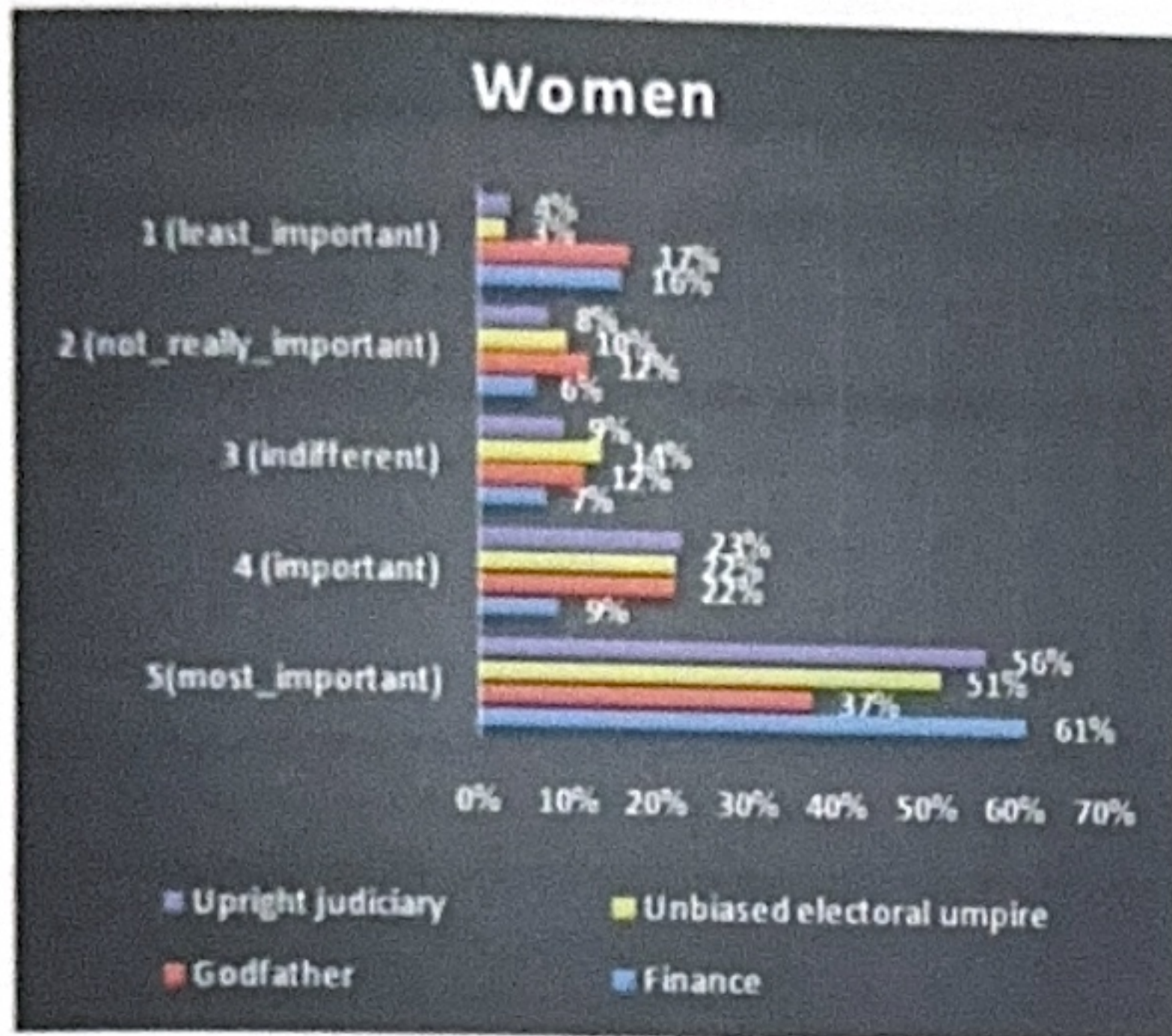
Have you ever thought of contesting for any elective positions? - Disaggregated Responses by Key Demographics (Women, Youth, PWDs)



Do you intend to contest for any elective position in the next general elections?

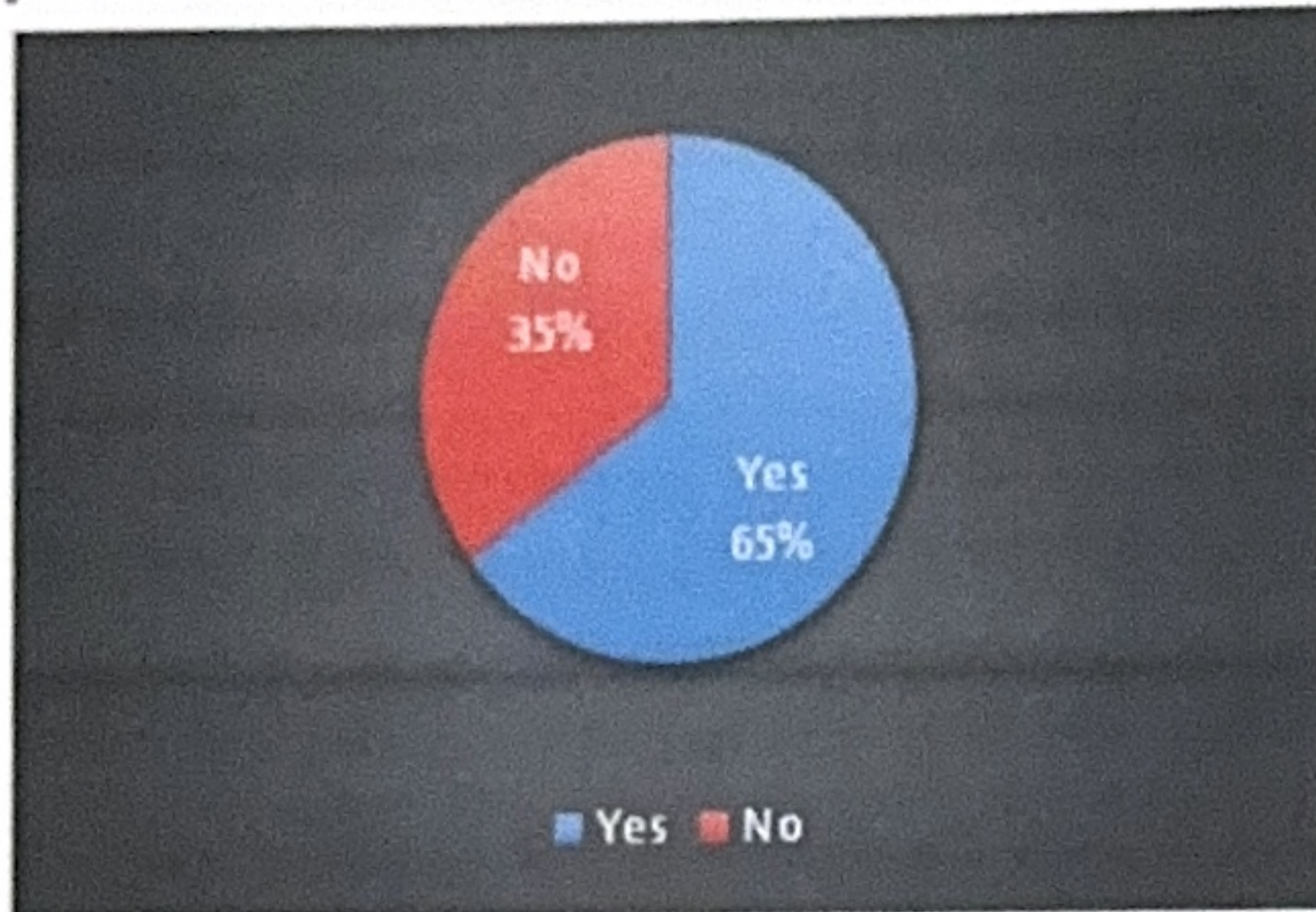


Which of these do you think is the most important thing you need to succeed in any election? Please rank your answer from 5 (most important) - 1 (least important)

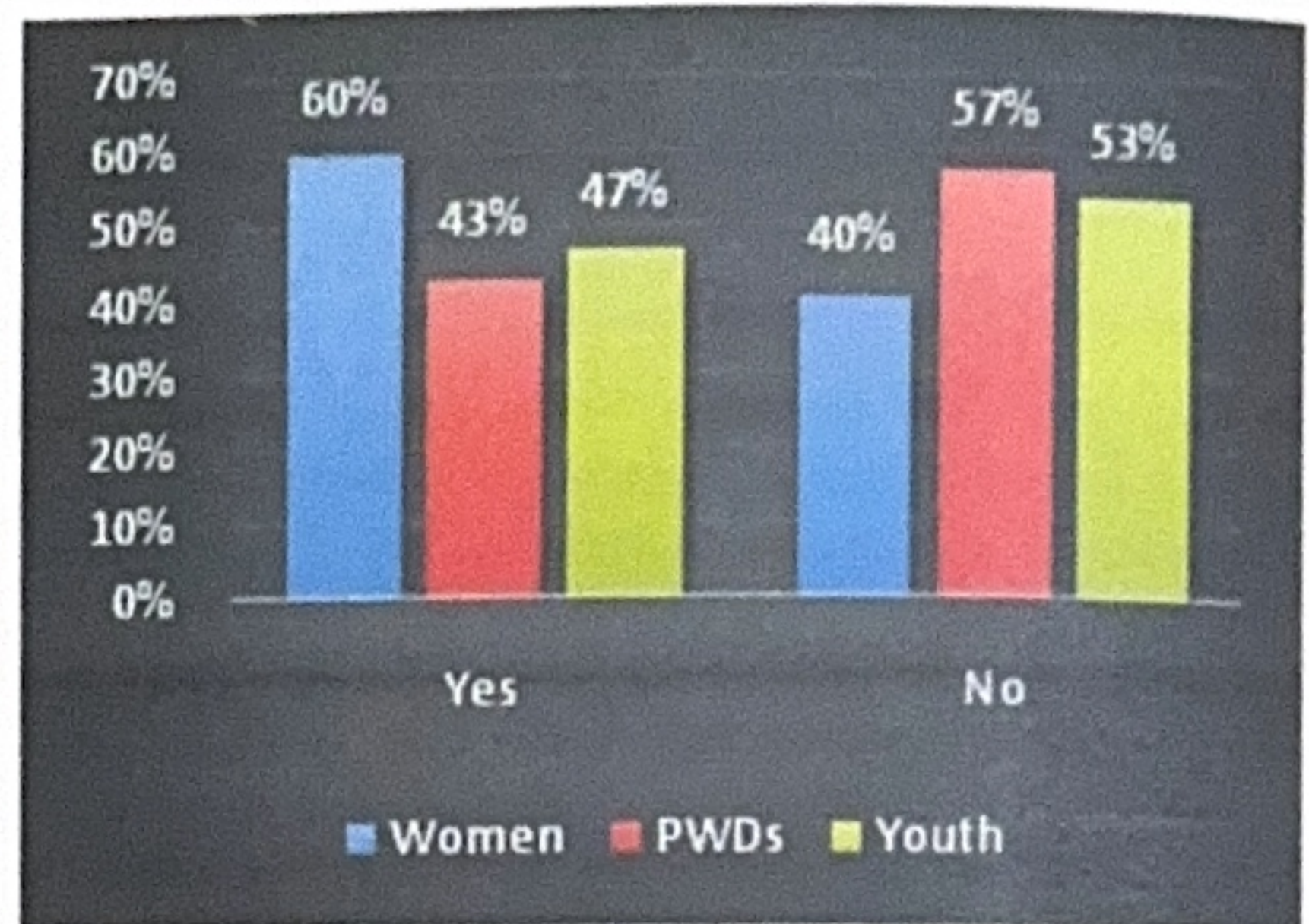


MARKET POLITICS PARTICIPATION – TRADERS ONLY

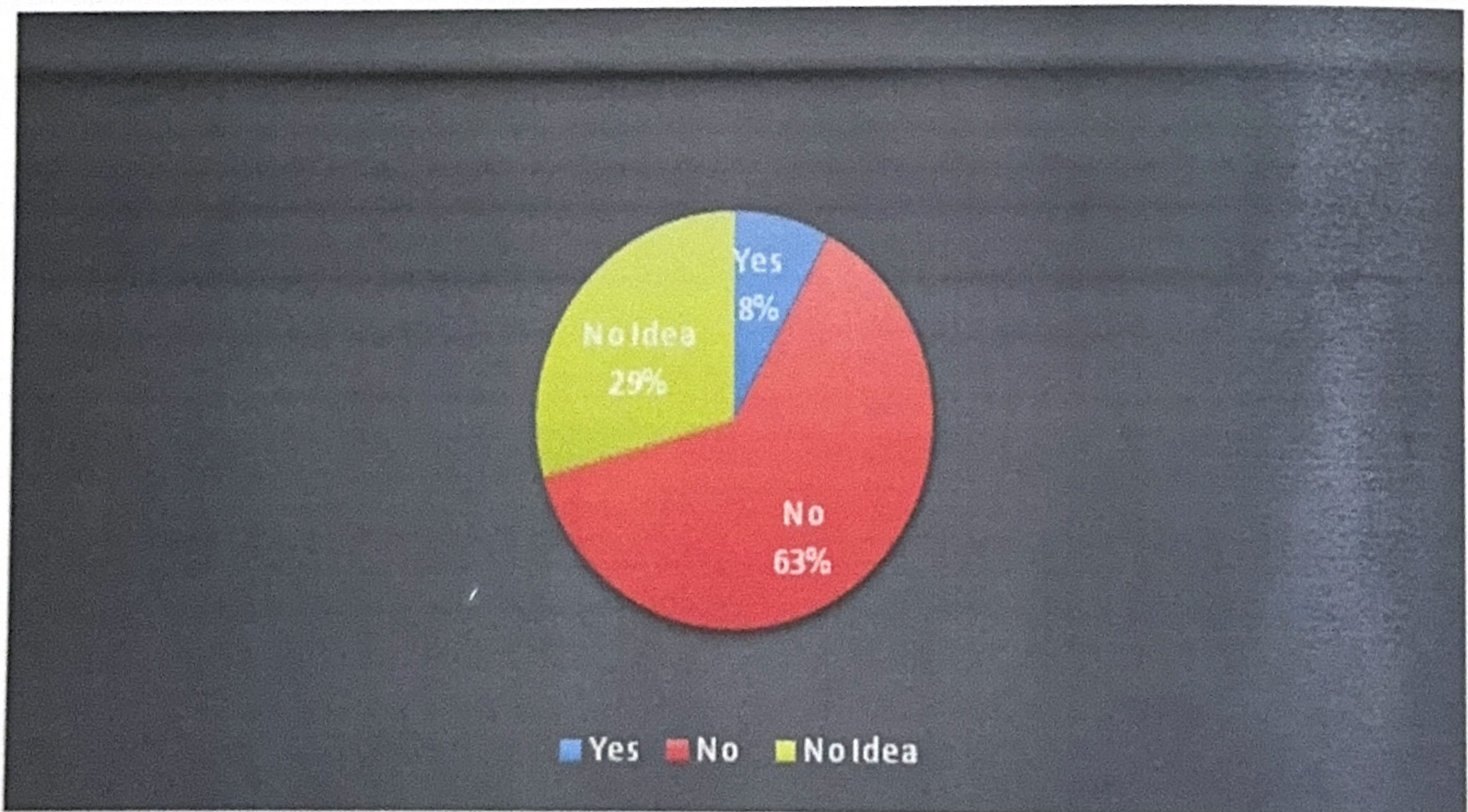
As a trader, are you a member of the traders' association in your market?



Have you ever thought of contesting for any elective position in your association

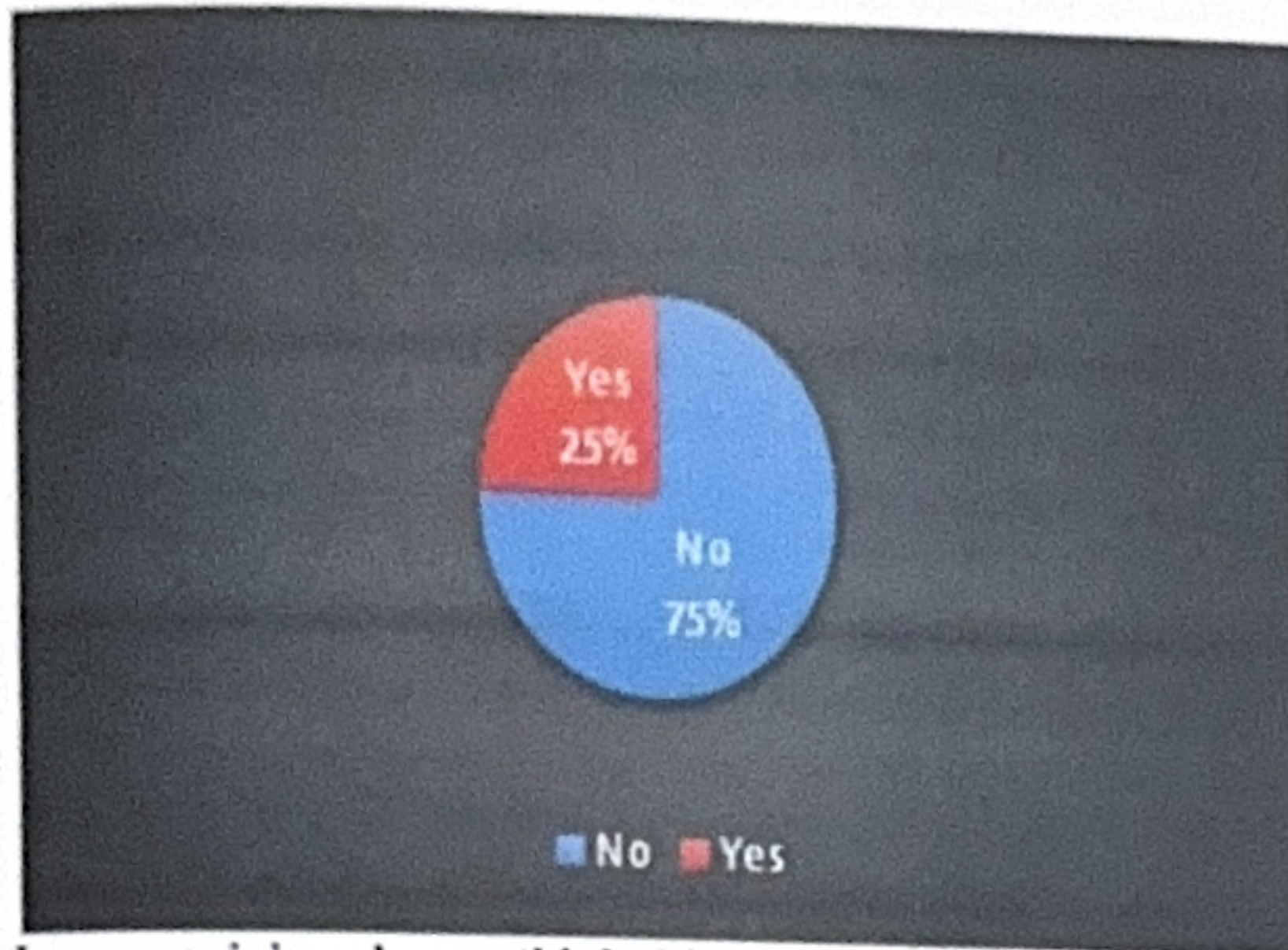


Are there restrictions on women, youths, or PWDs in your associations' bye-laws/constitution

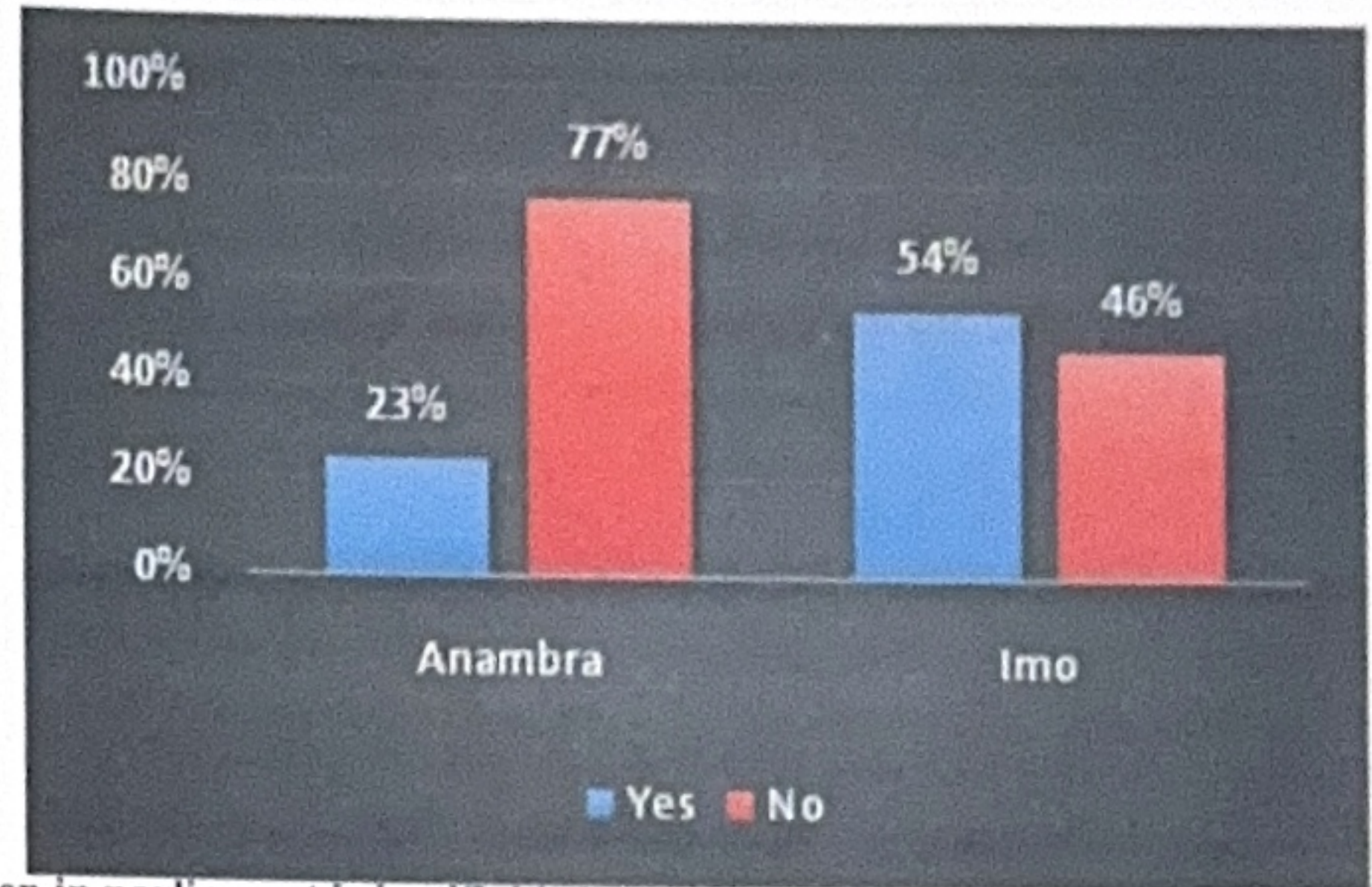


SPECIAL SEATS BILL

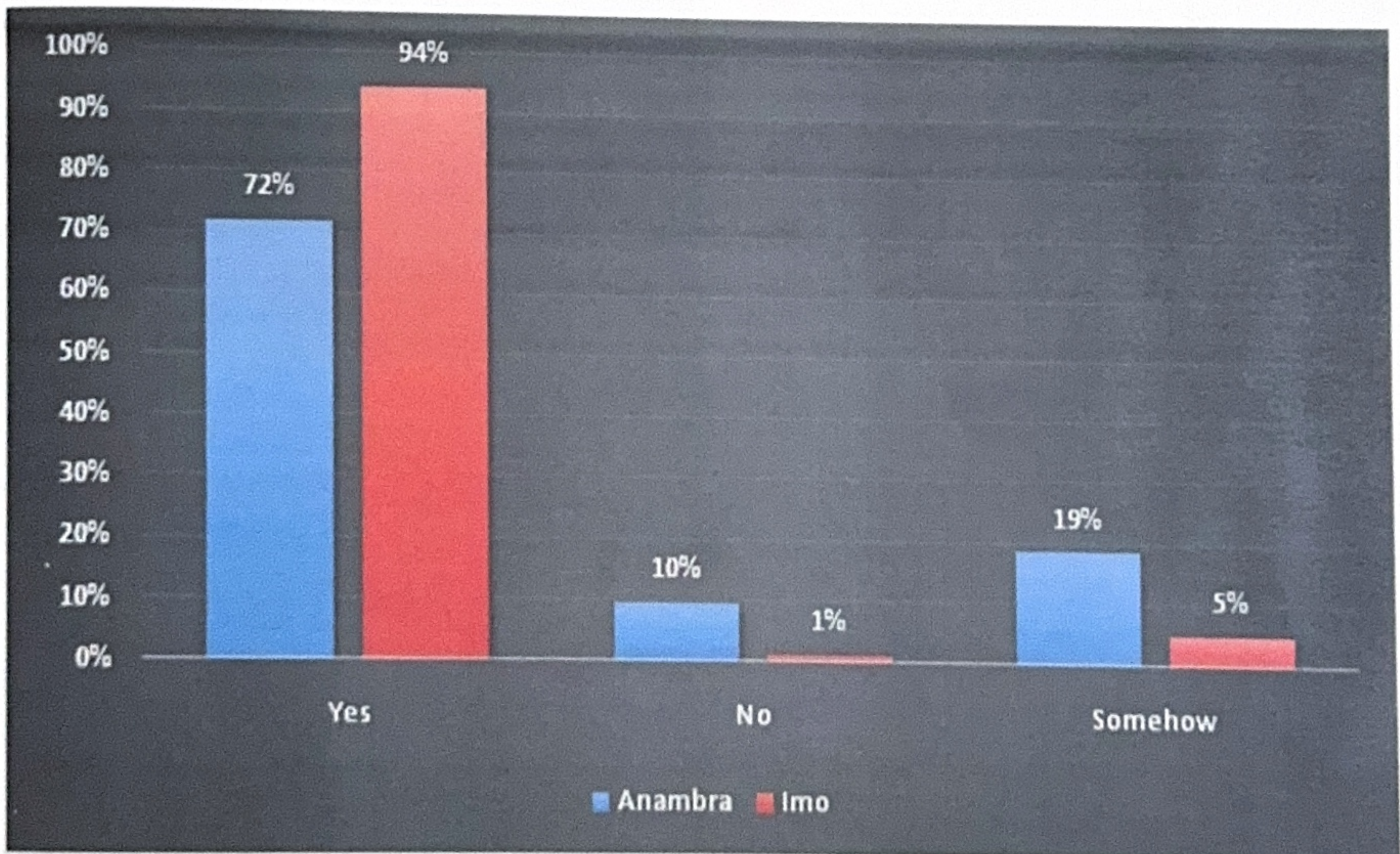
Have you heard of the Special Seats Bill



Have you heard of the special seats bill – Disaggregated by Anambra and Imo states

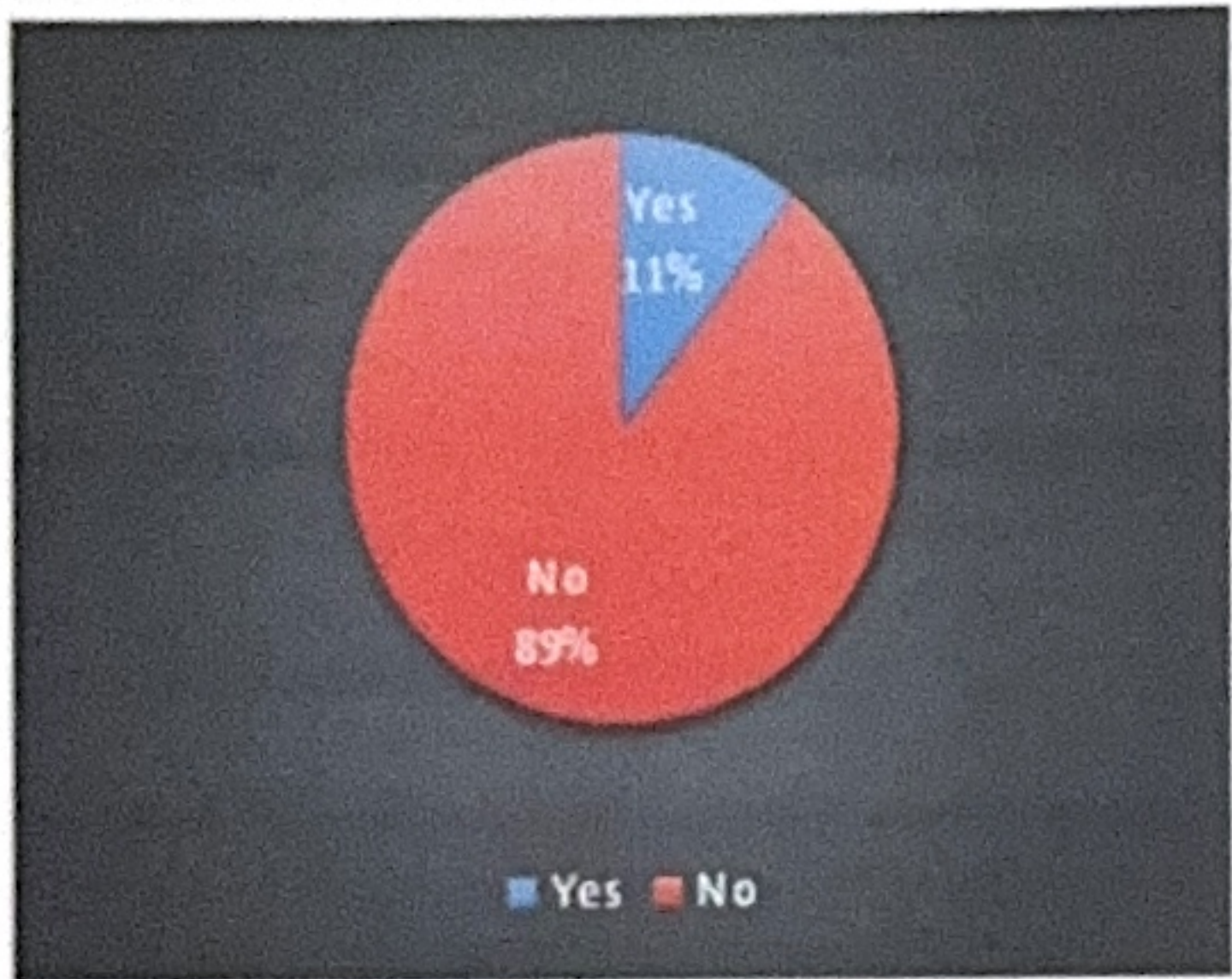


In your opinion, do you think this clamor for special seats for women in parliament is justifiable?

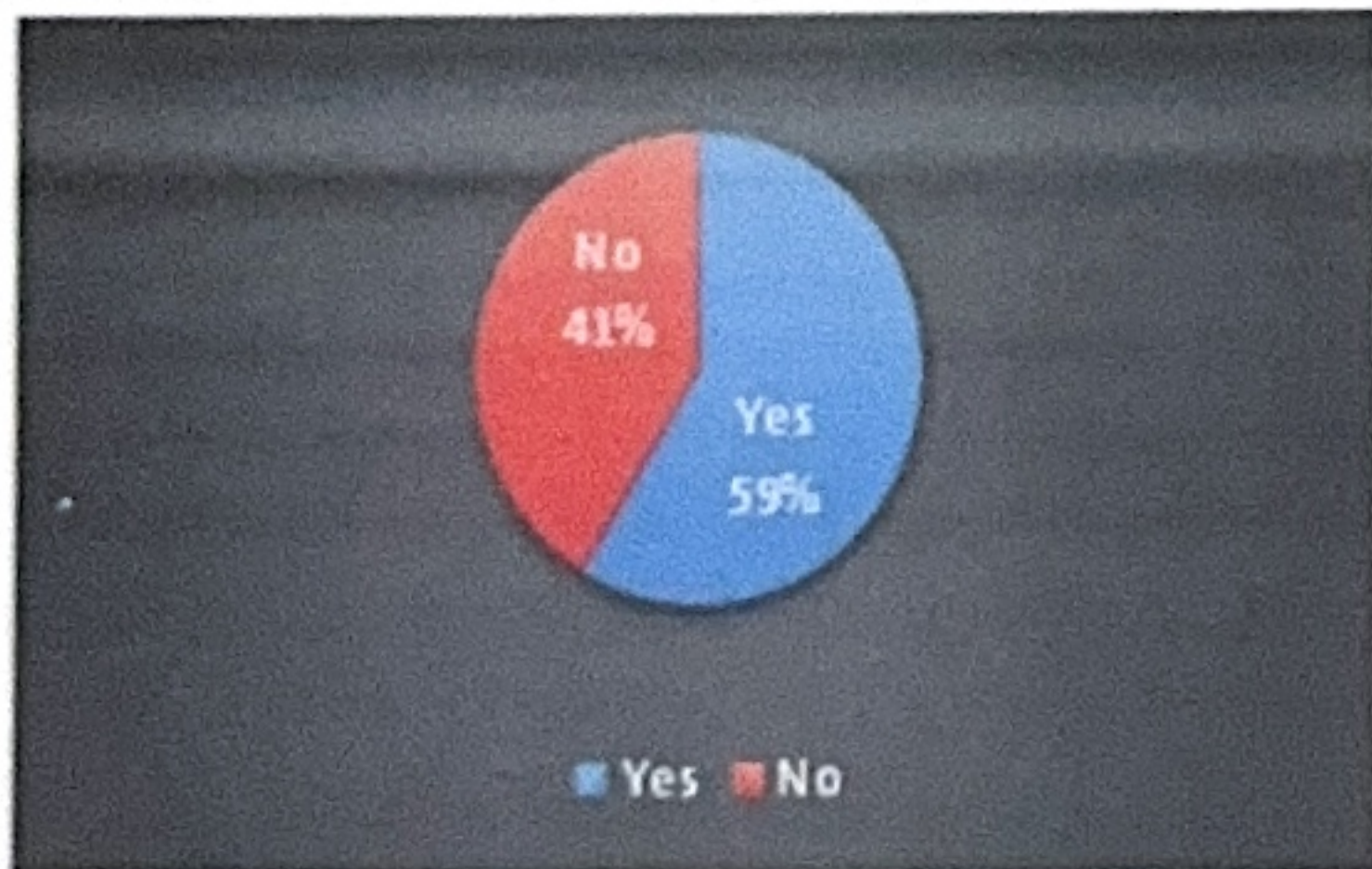


MISINFORMATION

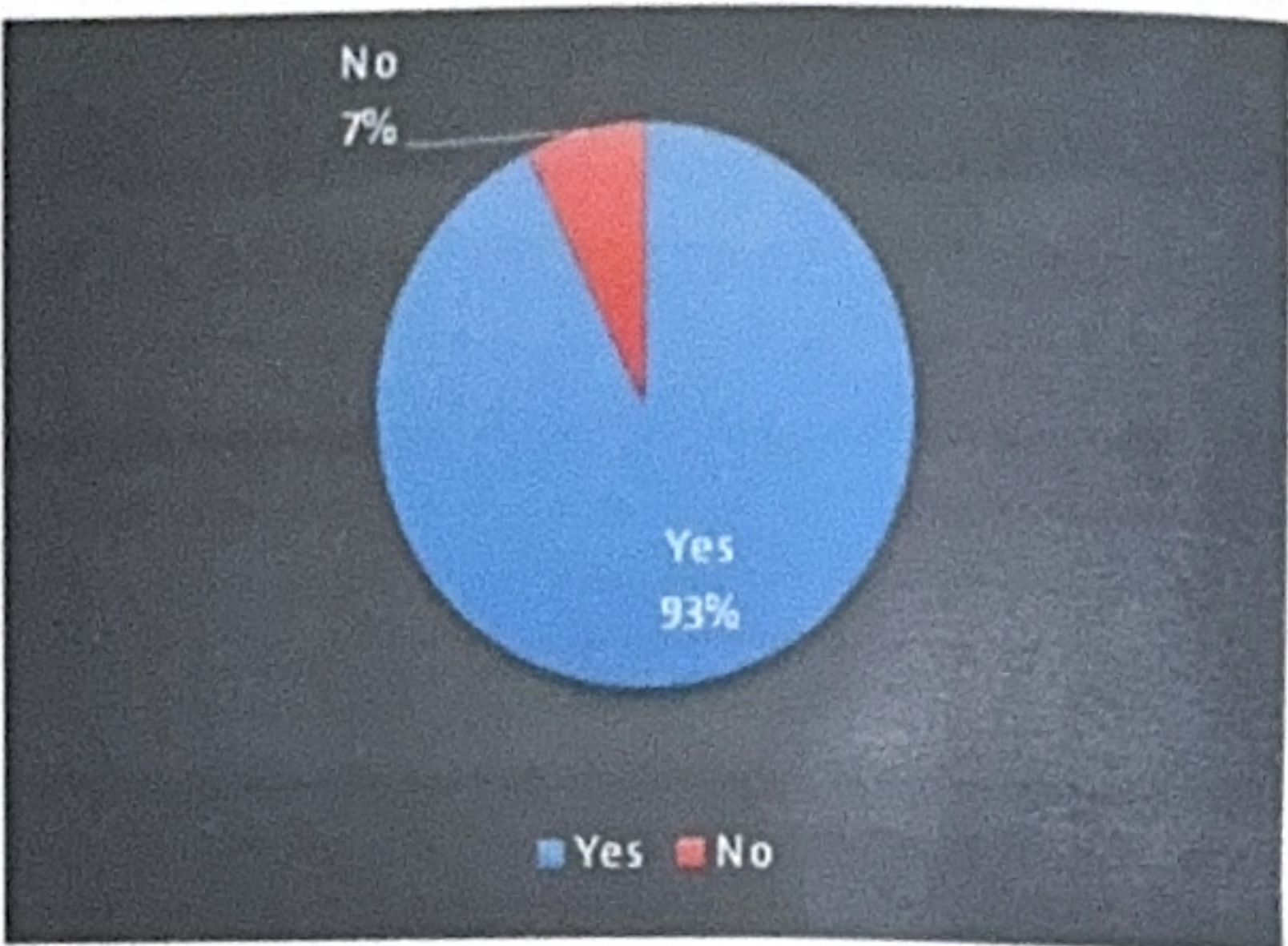
Do you believe everything you read, see, or hear on the media?
process?



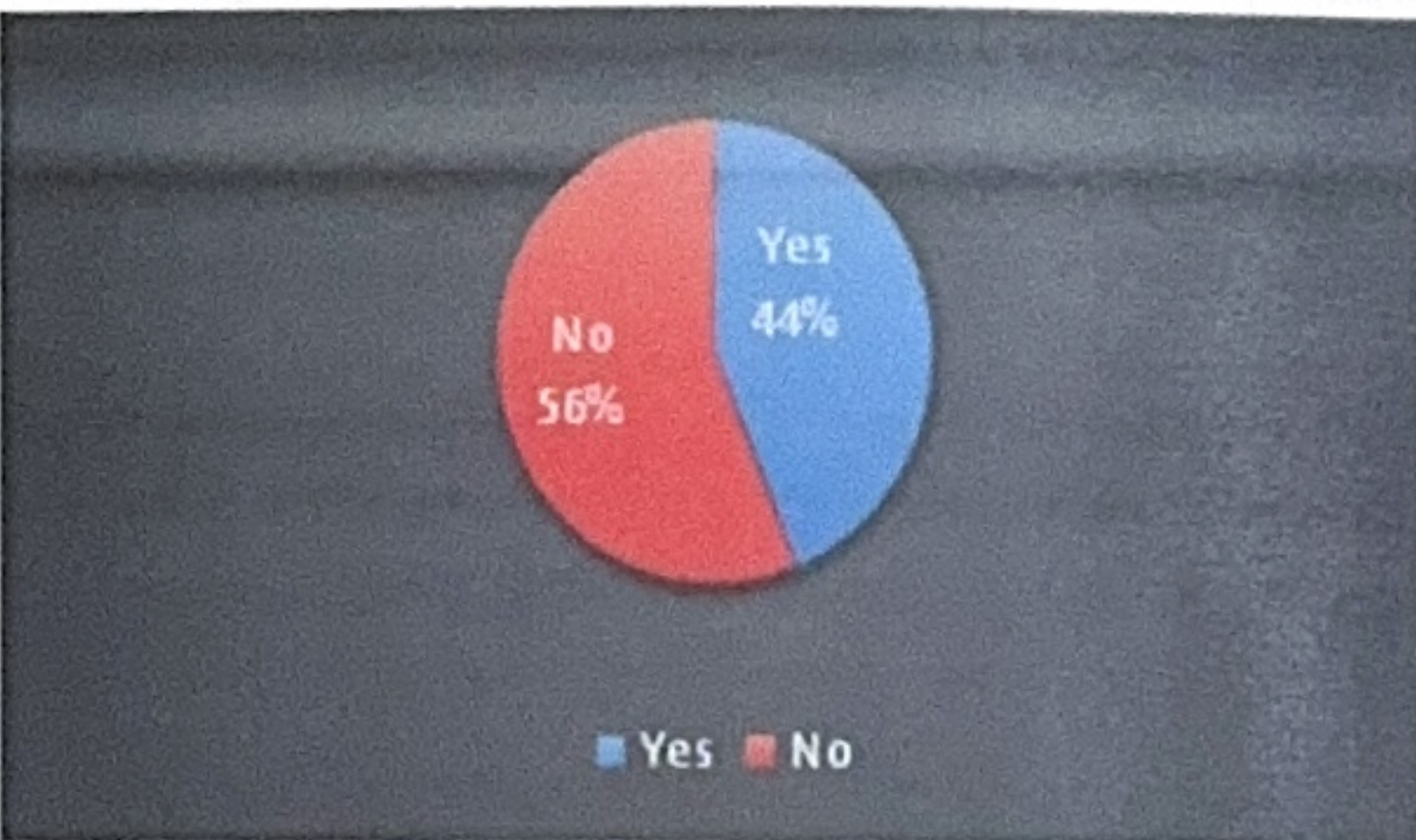
Can you differentiate between fake news and credible news?



Do you consider fake news harmful to society and the electoral



Do you know how to counter fake news?



KEY INSIGHTS

The Project IMPACT Baseline Study reveals that the exclusion of women, youths, and Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) from elective political offices in Anambra State is not accidental. It is the outcome of years of socio-cultural, economic, structural and institutional obstacles which have collectively disempowered these groups and imposed a sense of helplessness upon them.

This exclusion is one of the biggest drivers of widespread voter apathy in the state, as also reflected in the record-low 10% voter turnout during the 2021 off-cycle governorship election, the lowest in Nigeria's electoral history. Interestingly, though, the study found that 62% of respondents *claimed* they voted in that same election, while 38% said they did not. This suggests that official turnout figures do not necessarily reflect self-reported voting behaviour.

Disaggregated, 62% of women, 58% of PWDs, and 52% of youths said they voted in 2021. Yet, a majority of those who did not vote — PWDs (54%), Youths (50%) and women (57%) — did not disclose their reasons. Where reasons were disclosed, PWDs (18%) and women (11%) blamed the long distance between polling units and their homes. For many youths, the major reason was more fundamental — 12% did not vote because they were never registered in the first place. Lack of interest ranked second for youths at 10%.

To reverse this pattern, respondents recommended inclusive voter education, motivation and encouragement, accessibility support and facilities, improved security and safe voting environment, sufficient financing, free, fair and transparent elections, and the creation and enforcement of inclusive policies.

CONTESTING FOR ELECTIVE POSITIONS

Only 11% of total respondents have ever considered contesting for elective political positions. Among them, 15% of women and 15% of youths have thought about contesting, while a higher proportion of PWDs — up to 25% — have nursed political ambition.

Those who attempted and lost blamed their political failure primarily on the patriarchal nature of society. They pointed to sexual harassment, underestimation, discouragement from family, godfatherism, and negative stereotypes as the strongest obstacles. Our traditional and cultural systems still frame leadership as the birthright of men, and this conditioning is deeply embedded in communal decision-making structures across the country. This aligns with views shared during KIIIs — where finance, cultural inhibition, and systemic barriers were repeatedly cited.

A female aspirant in the Anambra 2025 Gubernatorial poll, Chioma Ifemeludike emphasized: "For a young candidate or a woman like me, many assume it's not possible even before you started. That mindset is a setback... These challenges - psychological, physical, and cultural are very real." "You need people's support, but often, the very people you look to for support discourage you. Another issue is the male dominance in our society. Many men believe women shouldn't sit at the same table for political discussions. This mindset exists in media, religion, tradition, and the general society. Even women sometimes discourage other women due to issues of self-esteem or rivalry. These challenges

- psychological, physical, and cultural are very real.

The data also shows that most respondents have no intention of contesting in future: 93% of women, 94% of youths, and 75% of PWDs said they have no ambition. Those without interest blamed a corrupt electoral system, fear for their lives, lack of finances, lack of interest, and prioritization of personal business over politics. While 7% of women said they have ambition to contest elections in the future, 6% of youth held same position while 25% of PWDs expressed their ambition to contest elections. However, among those who have ambition going forward, the most critical needs are finance, godfather support, encouragement, security guarantees, and a drastic reduction in the cost of nomination forms. Across all categories, finance was ranked the No. 1 requirement. For women, finance ranks highest 61% in the list of most important requirement for success, followed by upright Judiciary at 56%. Unbiased electoral umpire ranked third at 51% while Godfather is least at 37%. Youth also rank finance highest at 53% followed by upright judiciary at 44%. Unbiased umpire is third at 38% with Godfather fourth at 36%. The case is the same for PWDs as finance ranks above other considerations at 62%, while upright judiciary ranks second with 58%. Unbiased umpire is ranked third with 49% while godfather is last at 39%. KII respondents also ranked finance as the greatest challenge for women, youth and PWDs in contesting for elective positions followed by upright Judiciary, truly independent umpire. They called for continuous sensitization targeted at making the society appreciate the ability and importance of inclusion in governance.

MARKET POLITICS — TRADERS ONLY

In the commercial market space, 65% of traders belong to market associations. When asked if they had ambition to contest leadership positions in their market associations, 60% of women said Yes, 47% of youths said Yes and 43% of PWDs said Yes. Again, those who were not interested cited lack of interest, fear of failure, preference to remain ordinary members, and patriarchal claims by men.

While 63% of respondents said there are no restrictions against women, youths and PWDs in market bye laws, stigma, gender bias, high cost of campaigning, lack of awareness, corruption and malpractice remain active barriers. Women, youths and PWDs who have not thought of contesting blamed their positions on lack of interest, fear of failure, preference to be members as well as patriarchal claim by men. From interactions, there are no restrictions to the participation of these categories of people in the market bye laws. 63% of them said no restriction, while 8% said yes. Substantial 29% had no idea. However, among barriers to their participation are: low level of awareness, exclusion and stigmatization, gender bias, high cost of campaigns as well as corruption, malpractice and greed.

On what can be done to assist women, youths and PWDs, many respondents suggested reservation of specific positions for them, sensitization to address negative belief about women in politics. However, some others insisted that market leadership is strictly for men and women have no business whatsoever.

SPECIAL SEATS BILL

The level of awareness about special seats bill among respondents was generally very low. Only 25%

said they have heard about it before while 75% have not heard about it. This points at the need to intensify advocacy, sensitization and other efforts. Also, some of the KII respondents have not grasp of what the special seats bill seeks to achieve. In Anambra, 23% are aware of the bill while 77% are not. Greater percentage of Imo respondents 54% said they are aware of the Bill while 46% are not. While the situation in Imo is better than Anambra, the data shows the need for sustained awareness creation, sensitization and advocacy towards successful passage and domestication in the two states.

Those who are aware of the bill described as a progressive one, which will address inequality to a large extent. It will also empower underrepresented groups, while encouraging women to be members of political parties. 52% of respondents in Anambra agreed that the clamour for special seats is justifiable while 16% said no. another 16% are undecided. In Imo State, 88% agreed the justifiability of the bill with 6% saying no. another 6% are undecided. 72% of Anambra respondents agreed that women have what it takes for quality representation while 10% declined. 19% answered somehow.

94% of respondents in Imo said yes to the ability of women to offer quality representation while 1% said no. However, 5% answered somehow. Quantitative survey respondents mentioned public talks and flyers, sensitization and rural education, Radio, TV and town hall meetings as well as social media as veritable tools for awareness creation. The views of KII respondents were in alignment with this as they stressed the need to sustain advocacy efforts with critical stakeholders such as traditional rulers, religious leaders, members of state and national assemblies.

Support for the bill cut across various strata of the both Anambra and Imo states. Two traditional rulers –Eze Barr.Obinna Azubuine of Obizi Kingdom and Igwe Benneth Izuchukwu Emeka, (Okebo of Umueri) threw their royal weight behind the bill. “Of course it will bridge the gap. Because they are not asking the men to leave any seats for them. But what they are saying is that let more seats be created. Let men continue to struggle for the ones they were vying for before. But let new ones be created for the women,” Igwe Emeka submitted.

Eze Azubuine offered advice on how to see the bill through. “It's by reaching out to all strata of the society. There is need for sustained dialogue because in a patriarchal society like ours, you cannot get anything by confrontation and power is not given. You have to make your point, stress the issue, and then get what you want.”

MISINFORMATION

Indisputably, misinformation impacts electoral process in deeper ways than can be imagined. It determines whether eligible voters will come out to vote the extent to which they participate in any election. Both quantitative and qualitative survey respondents agreed that misinformation contributed a great deal to the historically lowest voter turnout witnessed in Anambra State during the Nov 6 governorship election in 2021. Fortunately, the study reflects that a good majority of quantitative

survey respondents 89% do not believe everything they see or hear on social media. 11% of them said they believe everything they see or read on social media. This still pose a challenge and calls for close attention by relevant agencies. Also, 93% of them considered fake news harmful to society and the electoral process while 7% said no. All the KII respondents equally held that fake news is injurious to society and electoral system.

For the Commissioner for Information in Anambra State, Dr Law Mefor, purveyors of fake news should be treated as criminals. "For me, purveyors of fake news should be dragged to court and made to face the consequences because they pose very serious danger, not just to the electoral process alone, but also to the entire society. For example, if you finish an election that somebody lost and the same person is presenting his failure to the world as success, that he was only rigged out, what that means is that whoever is declared a victor by INEC is only parading a pirate victory. You leave very serious doubts in the minds of people on the authenticity of this man's victory because there is unbelievable information that somebody else won and not this person."

More worrisome still the fact that a good percentage of respondents said they cannot differentiate between fake and credible news. 41% answered no while 59% said they can differentiate. Also, only 44% of them know how to counter fake news while 56% are not knowledgeable in this wise. It points at the necessity of educating the populace on fake news and how to detect and counter it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Dismantle cultural and traditional barriers:** Politics in Nigeria must no longer remain a domain subconsciously coded as male-only. To reverse this, continuous advocacy must be deliberately targeted at the primary cultural opinion-shapers — traditional rulers, religious leaders, custodians of customs, community elders, family gatekeepers, and even market leadership hierarchies.
Beyond surface-level sensitization, there should be structured dialogue forums, cultural shift campaigns and public declarations by royal fathers and religious leaders affirming support for women, youths and persons with disabilities (PWDs) to participate freely in politics. These respected authorities must become champions of inclusion — not gatekeepers of exclusion. Marriage status, motherhood, disability, age or physical appearance should not be criteria that determine who can contest or lead. Nigeria must evolve from the era where culture is used to suppress representation. We must build a new norm where culture becomes an enabler of inclusive politics — where traditional institutions encourage women and young aspirants to run, not discourage them; where pastors, imams and community leaders normalize the idea that leadership is open to all.
Politics must not remain a male-only territory. Traditional rulers, religious leaders and custodians of culture must be targeted with continuous advocacy to support equal inclusion.
2. **Re-orientation of women, youths and PWDs:** There is an urgent need to re-socialize and re-condition these three key demographic categories — women, youths and persons with

disabilities (PWDs) — to believe they are not just “voting blocks”, but legitimate competitors for power. In Nigeria, years of cultural stereotypes, religious interpretations, social norms and structural exclusion have led to an internalized belief that leadership is a reserved space for certain classes — usually wealthy older men. This mindset must be deliberately dismantled. Through targeted civic education, mentorship, candidate grooming programmes, political boot camps, and leadership fellowships, women, young people and PWDs must be supported to see elective office as a desirable, achievable pathway — not a sacred seat they are not “qualified” to occupy. Community-based sensitization is equally important: families, religious leaders and traditional institutions must be engaged to normalize the idea of daughters, young community members and persons with disabilities contesting and holding political power. Competence knows no gender, no age bracket, no physical ability category. The future of democracy requires that these historically excluded groups shift from the mindset of “cheerleaders and mobilizers” to “policy drivers and aspirants” — and the system must give them the confidence and the tools to do so.

3. **Intensify the fight against fake news:** Election seasons in Nigeria are usually flooded with disinformation, doctored videos, manipulated voice notes and propaganda deliberately deployed to confuse voters, discredit opponents or incite tension. There must be a more aggressive and coordinated national strategy to counter this. Government, electoral bodies, media houses, political parties and civil society should collaborate to create structured fact-checking programmes that operate in real-time during election periods. These initiatives should be supported with hotlines, digital platforms and rapid response desks that debunk false claims quickly and widely.

In addition, the legal framework should be strengthened to impose proportionate penalties on actors — including political parties, campaign teams and influencers — who knowingly spread harmful misinformation. Public education and voter enlightenment campaigns must also integrate anti-fake-news messaging using radio, community meetings and local languages, especially in rural areas. When fact-checking is institutionalized, backed by law, and paired with sustained public enlightenment, the ecosystem becomes more resistant to manipulation, ensuring citizens make electoral choices based on truth, not lies or fear.

4. **Make politics unattractive economically:** Nigerian politics is currently too financially rewarding, and this fuels desperation, monetized primaries, godfatherism and transactional politics. To reverse this trend, there should be deliberate policies that reduce excessive financial incentives attached to political offices. Salaries, allowances, estacodes, constituency votes and jumbo benefits should be rationalized and tied strictly to transparent performance indicators. Campaign financing rules should also be strengthened to block illicit funding and limit the influence of political godfathers who “invest” in candidates to reap returns later.

When public office is no longer a shortcut to personal wealth, only genuine candidates with the

mind of service, ideas, competence and a clear development mission will step forward to contest. This single reform can reduce vote buying, increase accountability, and reorient politics back to public interest rather than personal enrichment. In essence, politics must be redesigned to be a platform for service — not a business venture.

5. **Legislate affordable nomination forms:** Political parties should not be allowed to weaponize nomination fees as a tool of exclusion. There is a strong need to pass a law that sets clear and enforceable caps on the cost of nomination and expression of interest forms for elective offices. This will drastically reduce the current financial barrier that locks women, youths and PWDs out of the race before campaigns even begin. The legislation should further mandate political parties to introduce discounted or zero-cost nomination forms for these marginalized groups as a way of promoting equity.
6. **Empower INEC:** In addition, INEC should be empowered to monitor, regulate and sanction parties that violate these caps or create hidden fees. Making nomination forms affordable and transparent will ensure that access to the ballot is determined by competence and vision — not by the size of one's pocket or political godfathers.
7. **Institutionalize inclusive budgeting:** Inclusion should not depend on goodwill or ad-hoc gestures — it must be budgeted, funded, and tracked. Electoral bodies (especially INEC) and political parties should be legally required to set aside ring-fenced budgets dedicated specifically to inclusion programming for women, youth and PWDs. These funds should cover voter education targeted at hard-to-reach groups, leadership grooming platforms, mentorship schemes, as well as physical infrastructure to make elections accessible — such as ramps, braille voting guides, sign language interpreters, priority queues, and mobile voting support where necessary. Beyond this, there must be public reporting and independent audits of how such inclusion allocations are spent. When inclusion is backed with real money and accountability, it stops being a mere slogan or campaign point — it becomes a permanent component of the electoral system.
8. **Mandate accessible polling units:** Distance and inaccessibility must be eliminated, including mobile voting options for people with mobility disabilities. Government and INEC must make it compulsory for polling units to be sited within reasonable proximity to residential areas, markets, and transport corridors. Polling stations should be redesigned and re-certified to meet accessibility standards — with ramps, clear signage, accessible pathways, seating, priority lines, and trained support personnel on ground.

Additionally, flexible and innovative systems such as mobile voting centres, special transport support and assisted voting technology should be introduced for persons with mobility disabilities who cannot physically reach regular polling units. By eliminating logistical and infrastructural barriers, voting becomes not just a constitutional right — but a realistic, safe and dignified exercise for every eligible citizen.

9. **Introduce mandatory leadership quotas:** Reserve specific percentage seats in state assemblies, party executives, local government cabinets, and market associations exclusively for women, youths and PWDs. It is no longer enough to “encourage” inclusion — representation must be guaranteed. Nigeria should adopt legal quotas that reserve specific percentage seats across governance structures for women, youths and PWDs. This should not only apply to elective positions in State Houses of Assembly, but also to appointive positions in State Executive Councils, Local Government cabinets, Boards and Commissions, as well as leadership positions in market associations and political party executives. The quota formula should be guided by global best practices — ensuring at least 30% representation for each of these priority groups — with clear timelines, enforcement mechanisms, and sanctions for non-compliance. Political parties should be compelled to field candidates from these groups as part of their candidate lists. This would shift inclusion from tokenism to structural representation. With quotas, the governance table stops being a privilege for a few — it becomes a shared space where diverse voices are seen, heard, and empowered to influence decisions.
10. **Establish an Election Inclusion Monitoring Unit:** A formal Election Inclusion Monitoring Unit should be created — either under INEC or as an independent multi-stakeholder platform co-led by INEC, CSOs, and disability inclusion experts. This Unit should develop a national Inclusion Scorecard with clearly defined indicators — such as number of women/youth/PWD candidates, cost of nomination forms per party, accessibility of polling units, disability-sensitive voter education, representation within political party structures, etc. The Unit should publish quarterly updates, pre-election and post-election reports, and make these reports public and media-accessible. It should also have powers to recommend sanctions against political parties or institutions that consistently fall below inclusion standards. This structure will introduce transparency, pressure, accountability and competition into the inclusion space, ensuring that no election cycle passes without measurable progress in inclusion outcomes.
11. **Integrate media literacy into education curriculum:** Democracy in the 21st century is directly threatened by misinformation, propaganda, fake campaign narratives and manipulated content targeted at vulnerable voters. To build an informed electorate, media literacy must be developed early. Nigeria should integrate “Election Information Literacy” into school curricula at primary, junior and senior secondary levels. This will help young people learn how to verify political claims, differentiate facts from fake news, understand the electoral process, and resist manipulation from politicians and online actors.

Beyond the classroom, similar modules should be mainstreamed within churches, mosques, community town-halls, market unions, youth clubs, NYSC orientation camps and civic centres — using culturally relevant formats, local languages, roleplay, radio dramas and short video

stories. This multi-channel literacy will build a citizenry that thinks critically, votes based on evidence, and is less likely to fall for disinformation during campaigns. When voters are armed with the skills to sift truth from political noise, elections become cleaner, more peaceful, and more issue-based.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the Project IMPACT Baseline Study demonstrates that the problem of exclusion is not just about access — it is about power, perception, and structural gatekeeping. Women, youths and PWDs are not underrepresented because they lack capacity or competence; they are underrepresented because the system has historically been designed without them in mind, and often, against their political emergence. The findings show that unless deliberate, legislative and cultural shifts are made to make politics more inclusive, more accessible and less monetized, Anambra State will continue to witness low voter turnout, weak participation in elective contests, and entrenched political disengagement. This is a defining moment: if we want a different future, the inclusion agenda must move from token conversations to measurable action — urgently, consistently, and across all levels of political and civic life.



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