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Gender Disparities

Democratic Realities and Governance Outcomes in Nigeria

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Gender Disparities: Democratic Realities and Governance Outcomes in Nigeria

Table of Contents

1. Introduction 1

2. Gender Disparity and Governance 4

3. Historical Context: Nigerian Women in Leadership 7

4. Democratic Realities for Nigerian Women in Governance 11

4.1. The National Parliament 12

4.1.1 Will the Proposed Bill for Dedicated Seats for Women Deliver Inclusive Governance in Nigeria? 17

4.2 Cabinet Ministers 19

4.3. Judiciary 21

4.4. Women's Participation in the Electoral Process 24

4.5. Women in Corporate Governance 26

5. Drivers of Gender Inequality for Women in Governance 31

5.1. Limited Access to Education 31

5.2. Lack of Political Will 33

5.3. The Prohibitive Cost of Politics 33

5.4. Undemocratic Party Practices 36

5.5. Restrictive Socio-Cultural Norms 38

5.6. Widespread Violence and Harassment 40

6. Why Gender Equality in Governance Matters 42

7. Recommendation 46

8. **Conclusion** 49

References 51



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01

1. Introduction

Gender equality is at the core of the idea of democracy. The unequal representation of women in the democratic process could undermine a nation's democratic realities, affecting policy decisions and governance outcomes.

Democracy is based on the idea that all citizens, regardless of gender, race, religion, or socioeconomic background, have the right to participate in governance, influence decision-making, and enjoy equal protection under the law.

Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, Nigerian women and girls have continued to face significant disadvantages compared to their male counterparts in democratic processes.

According to Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) data, Nigeria has the lowest female representation in governance among African nations, with only 7% of its female population represented across both chambers of its National Assembly. This falls short of the 30% recommended by the United Nations (UN) for women in decision-making positions and violates the 35% affirmative action policy of Sections 42, 147 (3), and 14 (3) of the 1999 Constitution as amended, and Article 19 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Gender gaps in leadership have been driven by structural, socio-cultural, political, and economic factors, which have systematically delayed the meaningful inclusion of

1 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1999). https://www.law.cornell.edu/gender-justice/resource/constitution_of_the_federal_republic_of_nigeria

2 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). (2025). Women in national parliaments. https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking

3 United Nations. (1995). Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/decision.htm

4 The Nigerian Women Fund. (2024, June). The history of women's political struggle in Nigeria. Women Fund. https://womenfund.org/the-history-of-womens-political-struggle-in-nigeria/

women in political life, from entrenched patriarchal norms and weak local institutional frameworks to global development models that frequently overlook gender equity. These intersecting barriers have collectively slowed the pace of women's full integration into democratic processes.

As Nigeria approaches the 2027 elections, there is a need for reforms to boost women’s participation as candidates, voters, and leaders. These measures include transparent nominations, reduced financial barriers, gender-balanced screening, and strict enforcement against harassment, backed by public accountability tools. Mentorship and leadership training will further empower women in politics. Long-term change requires shifting cultural norms, embedding gender equality in law, and ensuring all policies and budgets undergo gender impact assessments.

This policy brief examines the impact of gender disparities on democratic processes and governance outcomes, the reasons for their persistence, and effective strategies for addressing them.



02

2. Gender Disparity and Governance

Gender disparity, also known as gender inequality, refers to the unequal access to rights, resources, and opportunities between the different genders. This inequality is rooted in social norms, power structures, and cultural practices that can lead to discrimination and unequal distribution of power and privileges.[5]

This gender inequality manifests in the different areas of life and forms, such as limited access to resources, unequal opportunities in education, employment, and leadership, genital mutilation, limited decision-making power, sexual violence and exploitation, unequal division of unpaid care and domestic work, etc.

Gender equality is the 5th Goal of the United Nations' (UN) 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[6] According to the UN, it is seen as a fundamental human right and "a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world." Therefore, it implies that an absence of it can hinder social progress and sustainable development.

In most cases, women and girls bear the greatest burden of gender-based discrimination. They are disproportionately affected by laws, policies, and institutional frameworks that perpetuate inequality. Such discriminatory systems often deny them equal access to opportunities, restrict their participation in governance and leadership, and create systemic barriers that exclude them from decision-making processes.

Over the past decades, the United Nations and other international organisations have intensified their advocacy for women's active participation in decision-making

5 Plan International. (n.d.). What is gender inequality?. https://plan-international.org/learn/what-is-gender-inequality/

6 United Nations. (n.d.). Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/

processes. This push goes beyond treating women's inclusion as a development target under the Sustainable Development Goals; it is firmly anchored in universal principles of human rights. The call for equal representation is rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)[7] of 1948, which affirms that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country, and further reinforced by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)[8], adopted in 1979, which obligates states to eliminate barriers preventing women from exercising their political, social, and economic rights. Together, these instruments establish women's participation in governance not as an option, but as a fundamental right, and the principles of democracy align with it.



Globally, there are 22.9% of women cabinet ministers, while in Africa, the figure stands at 23.9%. At the National parliament level, women hold 27.2% globally and 27.1% in Africa.

Globally, there are 22.9% of women cabinet ministers, while in Africa, the figure stands at 23.9%.[9] At the National parliament level, women hold 27.2% globally and 27.1% in Africa. Both remain below the 30% minimum benchmark proposed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995, as a critical threshold for ensuring women's meaningful representation in governance.[10]

7 United Nations. (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights. https://www.ipu.org/impact/democracy-and-strong-parliaments/ipu-standards/universal-declaration-democracy

8 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (2024, October). "Half of power": UN Women's Rights Committee issues guidance on women's equal and effective participation in public life. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/10/half-power-un-womens-rights-committee-issues-guidance-womens-equal-and

9 United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). (2025). Women in political leadership: 2025. https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/poster-women-political-leaders-2025-en.pdf

10 United Nations. (1995). Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/decision.htm

Currently, there are 11.9% women heads of state and 8.3% women heads of government in the world. Women speakers in parliament are 23.7% while women as deputy speakers in parliament are 32.6%.[11] While there has been gradual progress worldwide since this benchmark was set, the pace of change remains slow and uneven across regions.

In 2025, Nigeria ranks 166 out of 189 countries in the world in terms of the percentage of women cabinet ministers, with an 8.8% share of women cabinet ministers. Also, in the current 10th National Assembly, women occupy 7% of seats, with only 3 out of 109 senators and 14 out of 360 members of the House of Representatives being female.[12] This stark underrepresentation shows a deep democratic deficit and places Nigeria far behind regional and global averages.

The underrepresentation of women in decision-making and policy formulation has implications for the realisation of democratic principles, such as inclusivity, fairness, accountability, and equal representation.[13] In the absence of women's voices, decision-makers risk approaching issues through a narrow and paternalistic lens. Ultimately, this threatens achieving inclusive and accountable societies.

Therefore, increasing the number of women in decision-making and policy formulation necessitates addressing the root causes of gender inequality and implementing policies and practices that guarantee equal opportunities for all genders.

11 United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). (2025). Women in political leadership: 2025. https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/poster-women-political-leaders-2025-en.pdf

12 Ibid

13 Adebayo O. (2023, December). Reimagining women's representation in Nigerian Politics. Nigeria Civil Society: Situation Room. https://situationroomng.org/reimagining-womens-representation-in-nigerian-politics/#:~:text=The%20underrepresentation%20of%20women%20in%20politics%20results,impacting%20the%20socio%2Deconomic%20development%20of%20the%20country.



03

3. Historical Context: Nigerian Women in Leadership

Historically, Nigerian society has been shaped by a deeply entrenched patriarchal system in which men predominantly occupy positions of authority and power. However, this narrative does not tell the full story.

Across different regions and cultures, women have also held significant and influential roles, as rulers, military commanders, market leaders, priestesses, and chiefs, exercising authority in ways that shaped economic, political, and social life. Their leadership demonstrates that women have always been integral to governance and decision-making, even if their contributions have often been overlooked or underrepresented in mainstream accounts of Nigeria's history.

Figure 1: Some of the prominent female rulers in Nigeria's pre-colonial history

S/N	NAME	TOWN/VILLAGE	LGA	STATE	TYPE OF RULE	DATE
1	Luwo Gbadiaya	Ife	Ife Central L.G	Osun	Ooni of ife	Pre-Colonial days
2	Iyayun	Oyo	Oyo L.G	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-Colonial days
3	Orompoto	Oyo	Oyo L.G	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-Colonial days
4	Jomijomi	Oyo	Oyo L.G	Oyo	Alaafin	Pre-Colonial days
5	JepoJepo	Oyo	Oyo L.G	Oyoi	Alaafin	Pre-Colonial days
6	Queen Amina	Zauzau		Zaria	Emir	Pre-Colonial days
7	Daura	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-Colonial days
8	Kofono	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-Colonial days
9	Eye-moi	Akure	Akure	Ondo	Regent Monarch	Pre-Colonial days
10	Ayo-Ero	Akure	Akure	Ondo	Regent Monarch	Pre-Colonial days
11	Gulfano	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-Colonial days
12	Yawano	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-Colonial days

S/N	NAME	TOWN/VILLAGE	LGA	STATE	TYPE OF RULE	DATE
13	Yakania	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-Colonial days
14	Walsam	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-Colonial days
15	Cadar	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-Colonial days
16	Agari	Daura	Daura Emirate	Katsina	Queen	Pre-Colonial days
17	Queen Kanbasa	Bony	Bony L.G	Rivers	Queen	Pre-Colonial days

Source: Ayabam A.T (2013)

With the advent of the colonial era, the prominent decision-making roles that women held in pre-colonial Nigeria began to diminish. The introduction of indirect rule systematically sidelined women by restructuring governance in ways that privileged male authority while erasing traditional spaces where women had exercised power.

Indirect rule was a system of governance used by colonial powers, particularly the British, to manage and control their colonies without direct governance by colonial officials[14]. Instead of establishing their administrative structures, colonial authorities relied on existing local power structures to govern. This often involved appointing traditional leaders or chiefs to serve as intermediaries between the colonial government and the local population.

As a result, women who had once served as rulers, chiefs, and community leaders found themselves excluded from formal governance structures. In response to this marginalisation, women increasingly turned to activism, organising protests, leading resistance movements, and advocating for social and political reforms as alternative avenues to assert their influence and demand inclusion in public life.

14 Federal Capital Territory Education Management Information System (FCTEMIS). (n.d.). Indirect rule. https://fctemis.org/notes/20039_INDIRECT%20RULE.pdf

Prominent women figures emerged, such as Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, who led the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) in protests against unfair taxation and colonial rule in the 1940s. The AWU's activism led to significant political changes, including the abdication of the Alake of Egbaland in 1949.[15]

Margret Ekpo fought against colonialism and gender inequality between the 1940s and 1950s. She founded the Market Women Association in the city of Aba to unionise market women. The Association promoted women's solidarity to fight for economic and political rights. Eventually, she won a seat in the Eastern Regional House of Assembly of the Nigerian Parliament in 1961.[16]

Since Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the influence of the colonial system seems to remain, as women's inclusion in political offices has remained low. Over the past 64 years, female representation in elective and appointive positions has fluctuated between a mere 1% and 7%, far below global and regional averages. Despite decades of advocacy and incremental reforms, the pace of progress has been slow, showing the urgent need for deliberate, transformative strategies to break the cycle of exclusion and ensure women's meaningful participation in governance.

15 The Nigerian Women Fund. (2024, June). The history of women's political struggle in Nigeria. Women Fund. https://womenfund.org/the-history-of-womens-political-struggle-in-nigeria/

16 Ibid



04

4. Democratic Realities for Nigerian Women in Governance

Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, women's representation in governance in Nigeria has remained extremely low, with only marginal gains recorded over the last 26 years. Despite the expansion of democratic institutions and repeated commitments to gender inclusion, progress in increasing the number of women elected into political office has been painfully slow.

Nigeria is a signatory to, or aligned with, several global and regional instruments that advance women's participation in governance and public life. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)[17], the Beijing Platform for Action, and the African Union's Agenda 2063. At the regional level, Article 19[18] of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights reinforces the principle of equality, while at the international level, United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR)[19] 1325 recognises the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls and calls for their equal participation, protection, and leadership in all peace and security efforts.

Domestically, Nigeria's National Gender Policy[20], which was enacted in 2006, and judicial pronouncements[21] in 2022 supporting 35% affirmative action for appointments set a baseline for active women's representation in governance and public life. Anything less than 35% affirmative action is a violation of the policies.

17 United Nations. (1979). Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

18 Organization of African Unity (OAU). (1981). African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. https://placng.org/lawsofnigeria/print.php?sn=24

19 United Nations Security Council. (2000). Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/

20 Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA). (2023). National gender policy. https://www.wrapanigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NATIONAL-GENDER-POLICY.pdf

21 The Nigerian Women Fund. (2024, June). The history of women's political struggle in Nigeria. Women Fund. https://womenfund.org/the-history-of-womens-political-struggle-in-nigeria/

4.1. The National Parliament

In 1999, women held just 3% of the seats in both the Senate and House of Representatives, and only 2% in state assemblies.

Within this timeline to date, 2011 marked the year with the highest female participation in the National and state assemblies. That year, women secured 6% of the seats in the Senate, 7% in the House of Representatives, and 6% in state legislatures. Since then, the trend has reversed. By 2023, women held only 3% of Senate seats, 4% in the House, and 5% in State Assemblies.

Number of Women in Elective Positions in Nigeria (1999-2023)

YEAR		SENATE	HOUSE OF REPS.	STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
1999	**Seat Available**	**109**	**360**	**990**
	Number of Women	3	12	22
	% of Women	7	3	2
2003	**Seat Available**	**109**	**360**	**990**
	Number of Women	3	21	30
	% of Women	3	6	3
2007	**Seat Available**	**109**	**360**	**990**
	Number of Women	9	25	43
	% of Women	8	7	4
2011	**Seat Available**	**109**	**360**	**990**
	Number of Women	7	24	58
	% of Women	7	6	6

YEAR		SENATE	HOUSE OF REPS.	STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
2015	**Seat Available**	**109**	**360**	**990**
	Number of Women	8	23	37
	% of Women	7	6	4
2019	**Seat Available**	**109**	**360**	**990**
	Number of Women	7	11	40
	% of Women	6	3	4
2019	**Seat Available**	**109**	**360**	**990**
	Number of Women	3	15	48
	% of Women	3	4	5

Table: Dataphyte. Source: Dataphyte Research. Created with Datawrapper

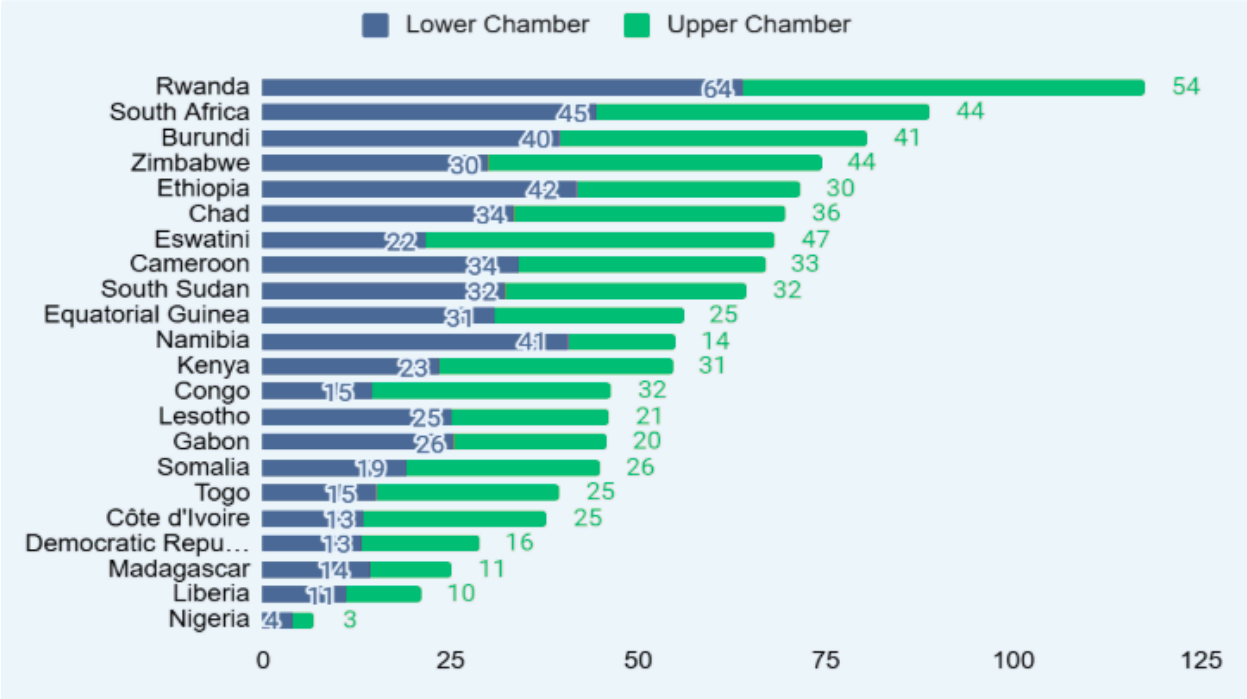
Of the African countries practicing bicameral legislation, Rwanda leads in women's participation with 64% in the lower chamber and 54% in the upper chamber[22], owing to its globally recognised gender quotas. Nigeria ranks the lowest in women's representation among African countries that practice a bicameral and unicameral system of legislature.[23]

22 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). (2025). Women in national parliaments. https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking

23 Ibid

Nigeria has the lowest number of women representatives in both the upper and lower houses of Assembly

African Countries practicing bicameral legislation in 2025 (%)



Source: IPU. Analysis: Dataphyte Research

Research shows that women legislators tend to prioritise social justice, education, healthcare, family welfare, and gender equality, sectors directly tied to human development.



A World Bank report showed that in countries such as Rwanda and South Africa, the rise in the number of female lawmakers has directly contributed to the passage of progressive legislation on land inheritance and reproductive rights. In Kuwait, just five years after women gained the right to vote and run for office, newly elected female legislators championed labor reforms mandating nursing breaks for working mothers and requiring companies with over 200 employees to provide on-site childcare. Similarly, a study from Stockholm University found that as women's representation in the Swedish Parliament increased, so did national budget allocations for education. Also, as more women assume leadership roles within political parties, these parties tend to give greater priority to policies that enhance health, education, and overall quality of life.[24]

This implies that if Nigeria continues to have a low representation of women in the parliament, it could significantly hinder the country's progress toward achieving broad-based human development. Without women's voices and perspectives in legislative decision-making, critical policies on education, health, and social welfare may remain underprioritized, slowing national growth and inclusive development.

In July 2025, the Nigerian House of Assembly took a significant step toward advancing women's political representation by proposing a bill to establish dedicated seats for women in both the National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly.



The question remains whether implementing a quota system, similar to Rwanda's model, is the most effective path for Nigeria to increase women's representation in parliament.

24 World Bank. (2013). Women as agents of change: Having voice in society and influencing policy. https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Gender/Markham%202013.%20Women%20as%20Agents%20of%20Change%20Having%20voice%20in%20society%20and%20influencing%20policy_%20Dec%2017.pdf

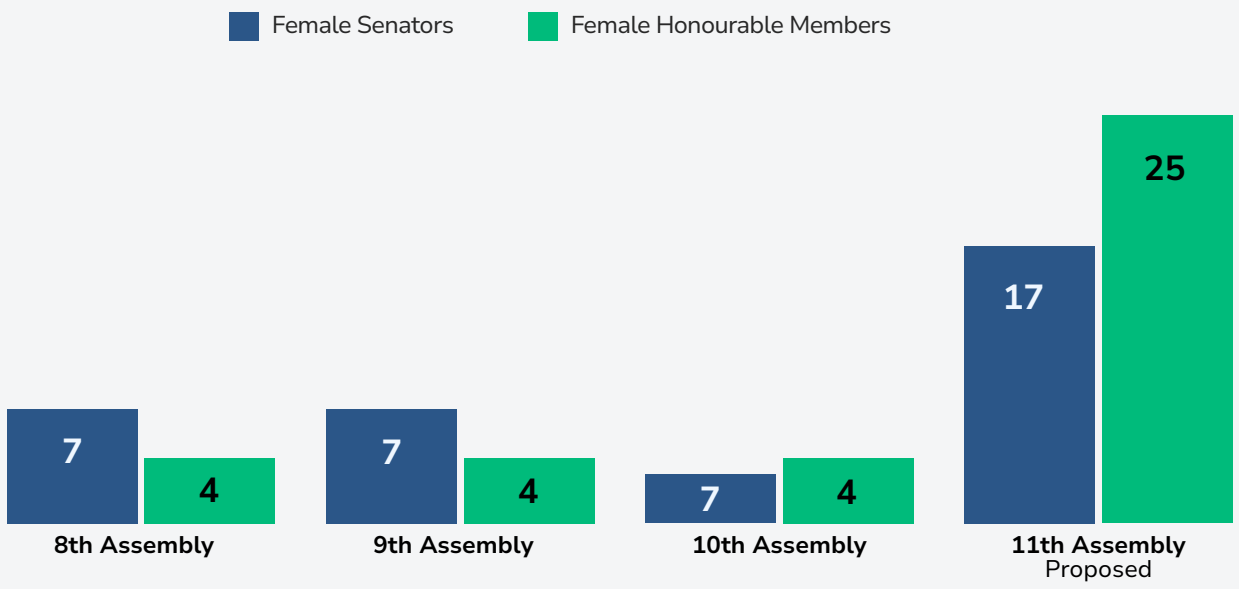
4.1.1. Will the Proposed Bill for Dedicated Seats for Women Deliver Inclusive Governance in Nigeria?

The analysis of the bill shows women would still hold only 17% of seats in the House of Representatives and 25% in the Senate, falling short of the United Nations' 30% benchmark for gender parity in leadership[25].

This means that even after the proposed changes, Nigeria would need to ensure more women win open competitive seats or pursue additional reforms such as party quotas.

Proposed Women's Representation in Nigeria's Legislature Falls Short of United Nations 30% Recommendation

Percentage of Women in Nigeria's Legislature (8th, 9th, 10th & Proposed 11th Assembly)



Source: Proposed Constitutional Bills, Media Reports | Analysis: Dataphyte Research

25 Salako E. (2025, July). Will additional seats for women deliver inclusive governance in Nigeria? Dataphyte. https://dataphyte.com/issue/senorrita/2025/07/will-additional-seats-for-women-deliver-inclusive-governance-in-nigeria

To meet the United Nations' 30% benchmark, each state would be required to elect at least three female members to the House of Representatives and one female senator, amounting to 108 women in the House of Representatives and 33 women in the Senate. Given Nigeria's current electoral realities, this remains an unlikely scenario.

Nigeria's current, proposed, and Ideal levels of inclusisve Governance

To meet the UN's recommended 30% benchmark for women's representation, each state would need to elect at least three female members to the House of Representatives and one female Senator, without the creation of additional seats

Category	House of Representatives	Senate
Current Number of Seats	360	109
Proposed Female-Only Seats (Compulsory Additions)	74 (2 per state + FCT)	37 (1 per state + FCT)
New Total Seats (After Amendment)	434	146
% Increase in Seats	+21%	+34%
Minimum % of Women MPs with New Seats	17%	25%
Ideal 30% Target (UN Recommendation)	130 women	44 women
Required Female MPs per State to Hit 30% (with current seats only)	3 per state	1 per state
Ideal Female Representation Without Adding Seats	108	33

Table: Analysis: Dataphyte Research. Source: Proposed Constitutional Bill. Created with Datawrapper

While the reserved seats offer a step forward, they also risk entrenching a dual standard in political participation. By confining women to exclusive slots, the policy may unintentionally signal that the seat held by women in the legislature is only

symbolic, but without power. This could promote tokenism and undermine the long-term credibility of women legislators, regardless of their capacity or experience.

4.2. Cabinet Ministers

The pattern of underrepresentation in the legislative branch of government also manifests in the executive, particularly in the appointment of women as cabinet ministers. Successive administrations have consistently appointed women in numbers far below what would reflect gender balance or equitable inclusion.



Although there have been occasional efforts to increase female representation in ministerial positions, these have remained tokenistic rather than transformative, leaving women largely absent from the highest levels of policy formulation and national decision-making.

Between 2021 and 2025, Nigeria experienced a sharp decline in its global ranking in terms of the percentage of women in cabinet positions, falling from 148th to 166th place. During this period, the total number of ministers increased from 29 to 48, yet the number of women appointed to the cabinet remained between 3 and 7. Currently, the total number of ministers has grown to 48, and only 7 are women.

26 World Bank. (2013). Women as agents of change: Having voice in society and influencing policy. https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Gender/Markham%202013.%20Women%20as%20Agents%20of%20Change%20Having%20voice%20in%20society%20and%20influencing%20policy_%20Dec%2017.pdf

Women's appointments to ministerial positions have been less than 20% in the last 5 yerars

Year	Total Number of Cabinet Ministers	Women Cabinet Ministers	Percentage of women cabinet ministers (%)
2021	**29**	**3**	**10**
2023	28	3	11
2024	34	6	18
2025	48	7	15

2022 is omitted. **Source:** UN and OSGF. Created with Datawrapper

As of 2025, Nigeria ranks among the lowest in Africa in terms of women appointed to ministry positions. It performed only slightly better than a handful of countries, including Mauritius, Somalia, Sudan, Equatorial Guinea, and Papua New Guinea, placing it near the bottom of both regional and global rankings. This poor standing highlights Nigeria's struggle to translate its international commitments on gender equality into concrete political outcomes.

Although Nigeria recorded its highest number of female cabinet ministers in 2011 under President Goodluck Jonathan's administration. Awofeso & Akinola (2020) analysed the performance of the women ministers in Nigeria from 2011 to 2015. It revealed that gender considerations play a significant role in ministerial appointments. Female cabinet members were found to be more likely than their male counterparts to influence the formulation and implementation of policies addressing issues that directly affect women and girls, which is a good indicator for development and responsive governance.

27 United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). (2025). Women in political leadership: 2025. https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/poster-women-political-leaders-2025-en.pdf

28 Awofeso, O., & Akinola, A. E. (2020). Does the Gender of Ministers Matter? A Critical Analysis of the Appointment and Performance of Women Ministers under President Goodluck Jonathan‟s Administration in Nigeria, 2011-2015. Issues in Social Science, *8*(1), 50-71. https://www.macrothink.org/journal/index.php/iss/article/view/17068/13230

The mere appointment of women is insufficient without power; increasing women's representation at the apex level of government with the power to make decisions holds the capacity to shift governance priorities.[29]

4.3. Judiciary

In Nigeria's judicial system, women also face the same challenge of low representation in leadership.

Nigeria has had only one appointed female Chief Justice of the Federation, Justice Aloma Mariam Mukhtar, who served from 2012 to 2014, out of a total of 18 Chief Justices. Similarly, out of six presidents of the Court of Appeal, only one has been a woman, Hon. Justice Zainab A. Bulkachuwa, who held the position from 2014 to 2020. While both appointments marked historic breakthroughs for women in a judiciary long dominated by men, they also highlight the persistent and significant gender gap within the country's highest judicial offices.



Mere appointment of women is insufficient without power; increasing women's representation at the apex level of government with the power to make decisions holds the capacity to shift governance priorities.

According to the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ), women remain significantly underrepresented across Nigeria's judicial system. They constitute only

29 Awofeso, O., & Akinola, A. E. (2020). Does the Gender of Ministers Matter? A Critical Analysis of the Appointment and Performance of Women Ministers under President Goodluck Jonathan‟s Administration in Nigeria, 2011-2015. Issues in Social Science, *8*(1), 50-71. https://www.macrothink.org/journal/index.php/iss/article/view/17068/13230

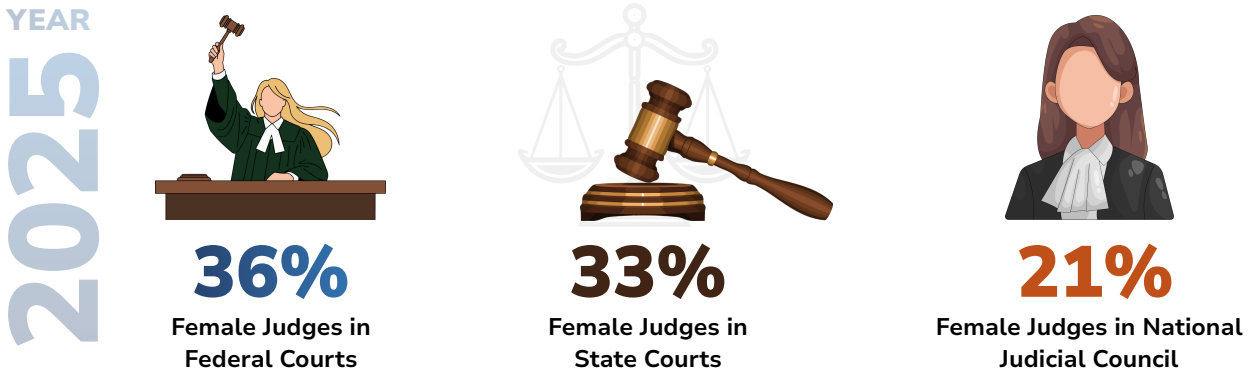
30 National Judicial Council (NJC). (n.d.). Former Chief Justices of Nigeria. https://njc.gov.ng/index.php/former-chief-justice-of-Nigeria

31 The Court of Appeal of Nigeria. (n.d.). Former Presidents. https://www.courtofappeal.gov.ng/former-presidents

32 International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ). (n.d.). Women in Law and Leadership in Nigeria (WILIL-Nigeria). https://www.iawj.org/WILIL-Nigeria

33% of judges in state courts, 36% in federal courts, and a mere 21% within the National Judicial Council (NJC), the body responsible for judicial appointments and oversight.

These figures highlight a persistent gender imbalance in the country's justice sector, where women are better represented at lower levels of the judiciary but remain largely excluded from the top decision-making and regulatory bodies.



Source: IAWJ

UNDP and UN Women conducted extensive research on women in the judiciary across selected African countries as part of the Women in Justice in Africa initiative under the Gender Justice Platform. The study found that greater female representation on the bench enhances equality, fairness, and inclusivity within the justice system by better reflecting the diversity of society. The presence of women judges not only strengthens public trust in the judiciary but also enhances access to justice and improves the overall experience for women and marginalized groups, who are often at risk of exclusion.[34]

34 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (n.d.). Africa: Women judges improve trust in courts, bring justice to less privileged and empower women and girls. https://www.undp.org/news/africa-women-judges-improve-trust-courts-bring-justice-less-privileged-and-empower-women-and-girls

4.4. Women's Participation in the Electoral Process

The steady decline of women's representation in key public offices since 1999 stands in sharp contrast to the steadily rising number of female voters across Nigeria.

While women make up a growing share of the electorate, their presence as candidates for leadership positions at both the federal and state levels has remained disproportionately low. This mismatch highlights a troubling democratic gap, where women's voting power does not translate into political representation.

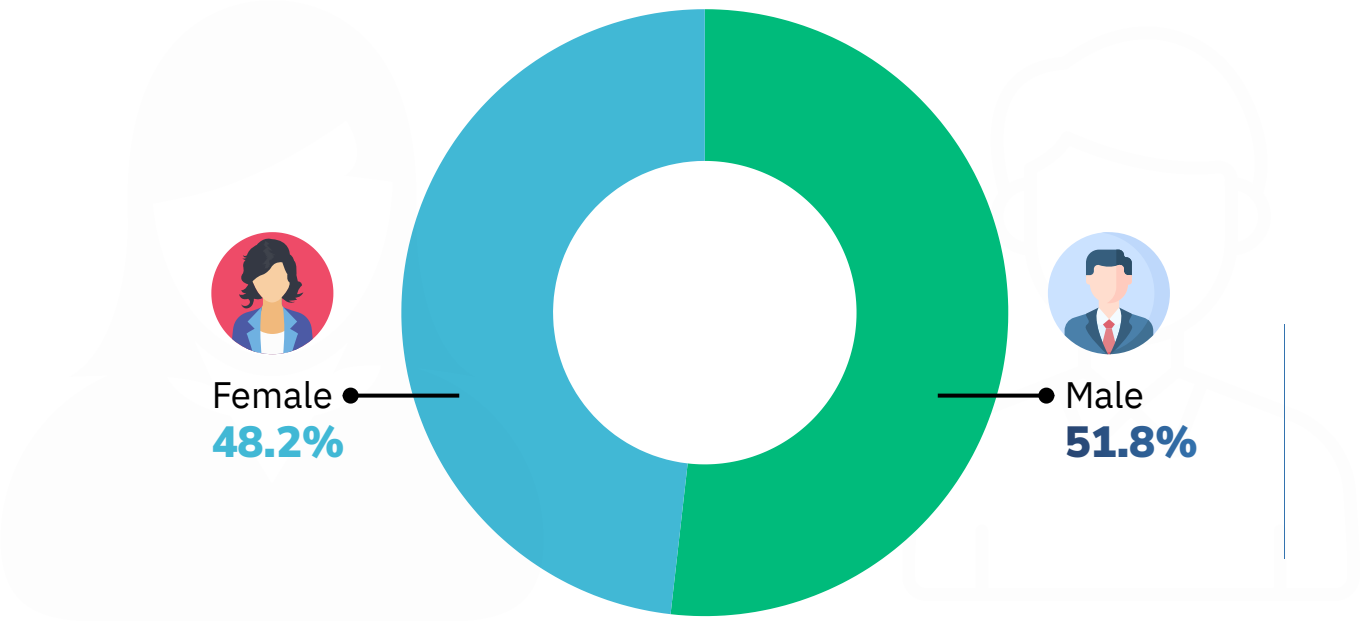
Between 2019 and 2023, the gender gap between accredited male and female voters in Nigeria showed signs of narrowing. The gap between male and female voters in 2019 was less than 3% but in 2023, it became less than 2%.

According to data from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), women constituted 47% of the electorate in 2019, a figure that increased to 48% in 2023.[35] While the change may appear modest, it reflects a gradual but steady rise in women's political participation at the ballot box.

This trend shows the potential electoral strength of women as a near-equal voting bloc, even though their growing presence as voters has yet to translate into proportional representation in elective offices or as candidates at the ballot box.

35 Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). (2023). PVCs collected by state versus registered voters. https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/PVCs-Collected-Registered-Voters.pdf

The Proportion of Male and female electorates in the 2023 elections



An analysis of female participation in elections as candidates in the last 5 elections reveals that women's participation in top elective positions has consistently remained below 15% over the last five electoral cycles. This includes candidates contesting for the offices of President, Vice President, Senate, House of Representatives, Governor, and Deputy Governor.

Women's candidacy for the positions of President, vice President, parliament, Gocvernor, and Deputy Governor has been less than 15% in the last 5 elections

Nigeria women's candidacy in the elections from 2007 to 2023

Year	Total Number of Nominated candidates	Female Candidates	Male Candidates	% of female candidacy
2007	**4,143**	**250**	**3,893**	**6**
2011	4,038	385	3,653	10
2015	3,311	490	2,821	15
2019	14,188	1,147	13,041	8
2023	5,094	508	4,586	10

Source: EU Nigeria election reports

4.5. Women in Corporate Governance

While female representatives in elective public offices are few in Nigeria, the reverse is the case in corporate governance; more corporate organisations are recognising the value of gender balanced leadership.

The PWR Advisory Board Gender Scorecard, based on an assessment of all NGX-30 companies, indicates a significant improvement in women's inclusion within corporate leadership structures in Nigeria over the past five years.



The share of board seats occupied by women increased from 21.9% in 2020 to 29.7% in 2024, though only one of the boards among the 30 largest companies is chaired by a woman. The data further showed that the number of women CEOs is increasing from none in 2020 to 13.3% in 2024.[36]

The NGX-30 companies represent the top 30 performing firms listed on the Nigerian Exchange (NGX), selected based on market capitalisation and liquidity. These companies are regarded as industry leaders and serve as key indicators of Nigeria's corporate and economic performance, reflecting trends in governance, investment, and business sustainability within the country's capital market.[37]

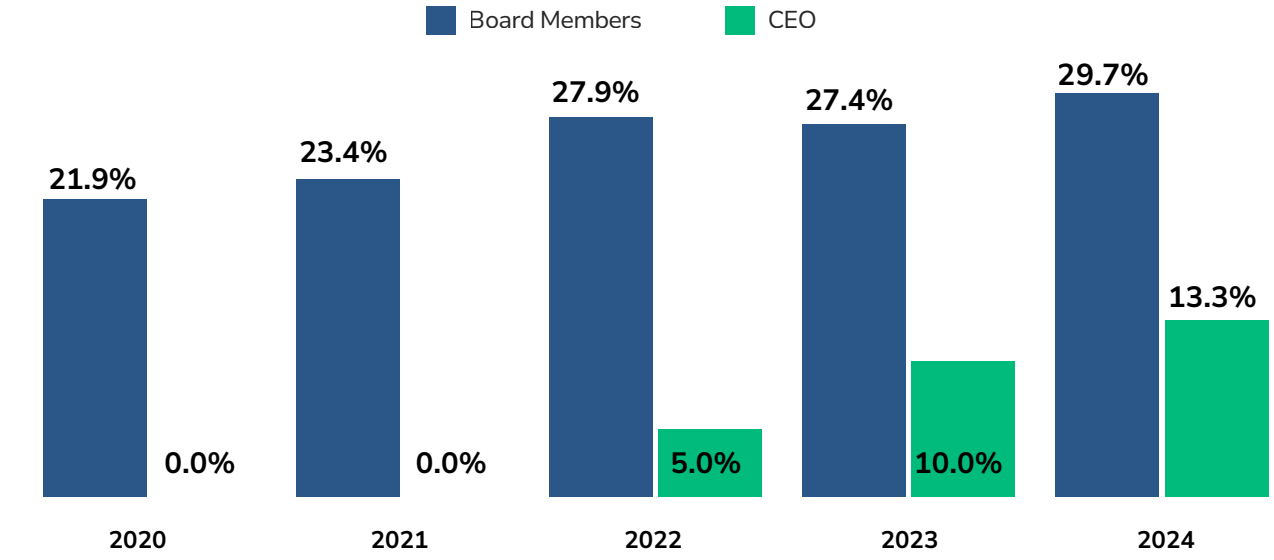
This demonstrates that the private sector has made more tangible and measurable progress in promoting women's leadership within corporate governance. Private organizations are increasingly recognising the value of gender-balanced leadership. This shift has not only strengthened corporate performance and accountability but also set a positive precedent for public institutions to follow in advancing gender equality at all levels of decision-making.

36 PWR Advisory. (2024). *The 2024 PWRA NGX-30 board gender diversity scorecard*. https://pwradvisory.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/The-2024-PWRA-NGX-30-Board-Gender-Diversity-Scorecard-1.pdf

37 Ibid

There are increasing number of women in decision-making positions in the corporate space

The Percentage of women board members and CEOs in NGX-30 companies from 2020 to 2024



Source: PWR Advisory Analysis: Dataphyte

Nigerian banks are at the forefront of promoting women to top executive positions, including Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director roles, outperforming other sectors in the country. Notably, several of these banks are among the NGX-30 companies.

For instance, out of 33 commercial banks in Nigeria,11 have women as their CEOs: Zenith Bank, Access Bank, Fidelity Bank, GTBank, FCMB, Unity Bank, Lotus Bank, Citibank Nigeria, Suntrust Bank, FSDH Merchant Bank, and Union Bank.[38] This implies that women hold 33% of top management positions in the Nigerian banking sector.

38 Nairametrics. (2024, March 22). *Top female MD/CEOs of banks and bank holdcos in Nigeria 2024*. https://nairametrics.com/2024/03/22/top-female-md-ceos-of-banks-and-bank-holdcos-in-nigeria-2024/

There are increasing number of women in decision-making positions in the corporate space



Source: CBN, Dataphyte Research

One of the major factors attributed to this increasing trend in corporate governance in Nigeria is that more companies are acknowledging the capabilities and significance of women in positively influencing their organisations and driving national economic growth.

Although progress has been made in attracting more women to leadership positions in corporate businesses, much still needs to be done in corporate business and public governance.



05

5. Drivers of Gender Inequality for Women in Governance

A closer look at the persistent underrepresentation of women in governance reveals that their exclusion is not a matter of choice or capability, but the result of overlapping structural, institutional, political, socio-cultural, and economic barriers that reinforce one another and systematically disadvantage women.

These barriers manifest in multiple forms, ranging from limited access to education, lack of political will, and the prohibitive cost of politics, to undemocratic party practices, restrictive socio-cultural norms, and widespread violence. Collectively, they discourage many capable women from pursuing public office. Beyond deterring individual participation, these obstacles reinforce one another, creating a cycle of systemic exclusion in which women's voices, experiences, and perspectives remain consistently marginalised in governance.

The result is a political landscape that remains overwhelmingly male-dominated, depriving Nigeria's democracy of the diversity, balance, and inclusivity it urgently needs to thrive.

5.1. Limited Access to Education

In many Nigerian communities, girls are often given less priority when it comes to education.[39] This has hindered equal educational opportunities between girls and boys. These educational inequalities may result in underrepresentation in civic participation, leadership development, and informed voting.[40]

39 Taiwo, K. (2023, May). 100 offers for 100 orphans. Dataphyte. https://archive.dataphyte.com/latest-reports/100-offers-for-100-orphans/

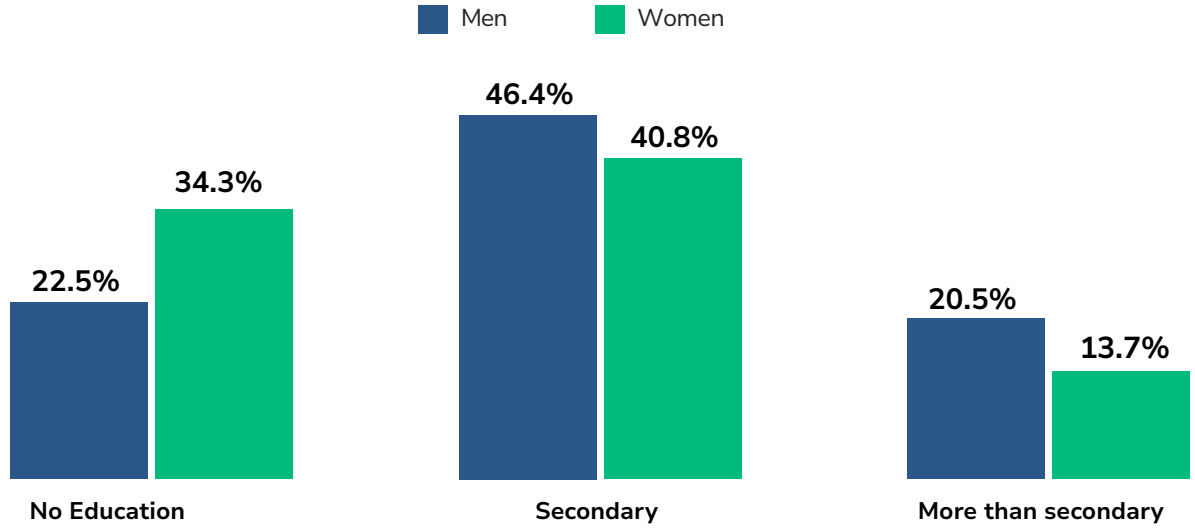
40 OECD. (2025). Civic education as a pathway to inclusive societies. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/02/civic-education-as-a-pathway-to-inclusive-societies_6d52238a/3f128be8-en.pdf

The 2023–2024 Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey shows that 34.3% of women aged 15–49 have no formal education, compared to 22.5% of men in the same age group. Only 13.7% of women have an education beyond secondary school, compared to 20.5% of men. Additionally, 40.8% of women have completed secondary school, whereas 46.4% of men have done so.[41] This shows the limited access women have to formal education in Nigeria.

A study shows that confidence in leadership tends to rise with higher levels of education and social status.[42] Young women from affluent families who have completed tertiary education show the greatest confidence in their leadership potential, while those from low-income backgrounds with little or no education exhibit the least.

Women in Nigeria are less likely to advance in education beyond the primary school level (secondary and beyond secondary education)

Percentage distribution of men and women of ages 15-49 years highest level of education, 2023-2024



Source: Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey Analysis: Dataphyte

41 National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) & ICF. (2024). *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2023-24*.

42 Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media. (2024). Taking the lead: How family, media, and school shape girls' leadership ambitions. https://geenadavisinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/takingthelead-fullreport.pdf

With fewer women advancing through higher education, the talent pool available for leadership, policymaking, and innovation remains restricted, ultimately weakening democratic representation. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) advised that education is foundational for civic participation, leadership development, and informed voting.[43]

5.2. Lack of Political Will

Nigeria is yet to implement the 35% affirmative action or quota in female representation, despite the Supreme Court ruling in 2022, stating that "the failure of the Federal Government to implement the 35% affirmative action policy is illegal, unlawful, null, and an arbitrary violation of the National Gender Policy, 2006."

In August 2025, the National Assembly moved to review the bill on 35% affirmative action by creating additional seats for women in the national and state assemblies. An analysis by Dataphyte[44] shows that the proposed seats still fall short of the benchmark of 30% set by the UN and the 35% affirmative action.



This has yet to be implemented, and neither have there been legal actions to ensure its implementation or accountability at the federal and state levels.

5.3. The Prohibitive Cost of Politics

Nigeria's electoral environment is expensive, where high nomination fees, party levies, and campaign expenses exclude those without substantial financial backing, especially women.

43 Center for Civic Education. (n.d.). The role of civic education. https://civiced.org/papers/articles_role.html

44 Salako E. (2025, July). Will additional seats for women deliver inclusive governance in Nigeria? Dataphyte. https://dataphyte.com/issue/senorrita/2025/07/will-additional-seats-for-women-deliver-inclusive-governance-in-nigeria

One example of this high cost in politics is the cost of party tickets for electoral positions in some of the major political parties in Nigeria in the 2022/2023 election cycle, which ran into millions of Naira.[45] This prevents women with financial constraints from actively participating in politics.

The cost of tickets across some of the major political parties in Nigeria in the 2022/2023 election cycle

	APC	PDP	NNPP	YPP	SDP
Presidential	**100 million**	**40 million**	**30 million**	**20 million**	**35 million**
Governorship	50 million	21 million	11 million	10 million	15 million
Senate	20 million	3.5 million	3 million	3 million	3 million
House of Rep	10 million	2.5 million	1.2 million	2 million	1.7 million
House of Assembly	2 million	600,000	-	400,000	500,000

Women were exempted from paying the fee for presidential ticket for APC

Table: Dataphyte Research. Source: BBC News Pidgin. Created with Datawrapper

Also, a study showed that men are generally more willing and able to deploy financial resources to influence voter choices during election campaigns, giving them a distinct advantage over women.[46] Men often outspend their female counterparts on activities such as mobilization, publicity, and vote inducement, reinforcing their dominance in highly monetized political contests.[47]

45 BBC News Pidgin. (2022, April). Wia Nigeria dey see money wey dem dey give women for politics? https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/tori-61187820

46 Maigari, Y. A. (2020). Impact of colonial rule on the socio-political status of women in Northern Nigeria. Global Journal of Cultural, Political and International Issues, 1(1).

47 Ace Project. (n.d.). Male allies and social norm change in politics. https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ge/ge9/male-allies-and-social-norm-change-in-politics-and

Oluremi Sonaiya, a female presidential candidate in the 2015 elections, stated that the monetization of politics is the greatest challenge for politicians. Voters expect and demand material incentives to vote. She said her attempts to convince voters to look beyond immediate gratification were unsuccessful: "I was talking to a group of women, and I asked them what they would prefer: rice, wrappers, head-ties, or being able to go to a hospital when they were pregnant and be sure they and their babies would leave the hospital alive because of the services. They reflected for a short time and then said, 'Yes, that would be the best thing, but right now, we need N2000 to buy rice." [48]

In a system where money decisively shapes electoral outcomes, a female candidate will be at a disadvantage if she lacks resources, donor networks, or high-value financiers.

In Nigeria, women face systemic barriers that limit their economic potentials such as land, credit, and secure employment. These limitations do more than undermine women's livelihoods; they restrict their ability to influence policies, shape governance outcomes, and take part fully in democratic life.

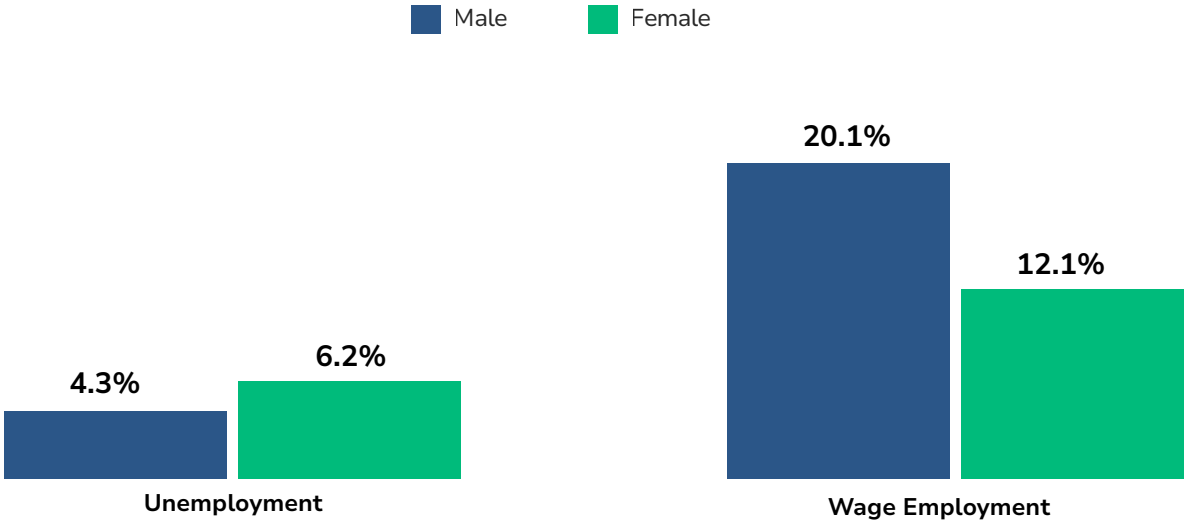
According to the NDHS survey, Nigerian women have less access to formal employment opportunities and are more likely to be found in vulnerable forms of informal employment, often characterised by a lack of job security, pensions, or health benefits, which perpetuates cycles of poverty and economic dependence.

This imbalance not only tilts the political playing field in favour of men but also perpetuates the exclusion of women from competitive races.

48 Akpan-Obong, P. & Ette, M. (2022, March). Negotiating Access and Privilege: Politics of Female Participation and Representation in Nigeria. Journal of Asian and African Studies, *58*(7), 1309–1325. https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096221084253

Women in Nigeria are more likely to be unemployed or with far fewer represention in wage employment.

Percentage distribution of men and women in employment, 2023-2024



Source: Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey Analysis: Dataphyte

5.4. Undemocratic Party Practices

Local party leaders, often referred to as “party barons”, exercise significant control over candidate selection. Screening committees, typically dominated by men, impose subjective criteria that disadvantage women. Without gender-balanced committees or clear, transparent processes, women’s candidacies are frequently sidelined.

In an interview conducted on a selection of female and male politicians in different cities in 4 out of the 6 geopolitical zones in the country - north-central, south-east, south-west, and south-south of Nigeria, a female politician observed that women are rarely included in the early stages of political party formation, where key structures and strategies are defined.[49]

49 Akpan-Obong, P. & Ette, M. (2022, March). Negotiating Access and Privilege: Politics of Female Participation and Representation in Nigeria. Journal of Asian and African Studies, *58*(7), 1309–1325. https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096221084253

When roles are eventually assigned, they are often relegated to the position of "women leader," a role largely symbolic and disconnected from real decision-making. Their participation is typically limited to mobilisation and welfare activities, leaving them excluded from shaping the party's core agenda and policies.

Christina Eligwe-Ude, a former consultant at the United Nations who had contested the APC primaries for the Orlu, Orsu, and Oru East Federal Constituency in Imo State, in 2019 recounted her experience contesting party primaries, when the Governor of Imo state at the time declared her male opponent the winner without a single vote being cast. She explained that her candidacy was barely recognised throughout the process, reflecting deep-rooted bias. She further noted that voting procedures were manipulated, and unscheduled meetings were convened to pressure female aspirants into stepping down, effectively silencing women's participation.[50]

Obiageli Ezekwesili, the 2019 presidential candidate of the Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN), noted that most party primaries did not provide a level playing field. According to her, many women and young aspirants were either intimidated, pressured to step down, or deliberately screened out and replaced with male candidates.[51]

50 Onyeji, E. (2018, December). Analysis: Women not allowed level playing field in Nigeria's party primaries. Premium Times. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/300412-analysis-women-not-allowed-level-playing-field-in-nigerias-party-primaries.html

51 Ibid

5.5. Restrictive Socio-Cultural Norms

Gender disparity is deeply entrenched in sociocultural practices. In various Nigerian communities, gender roles are prescribed by cultural, religious, and social norms, which oftentimes repress their self-worth and human development potential.[52]

A UN Women's report shows that sociocultural factors significantly contribute to gender disparity by reinforcing traditional roles, beliefs, and practices that limit opportunities and rights based on gender. At the same time, prevailing stereotypes about gender capabilities can hinder women's advancement in leadership.[53]

For instance, in March 2016, a female senator, Abiodun Olujimi, presented a Gender and Equality Opportunities Bill to the Senate, detailing how women should be guaranteed equal rights to opportunities in employment and inheritance. Not only was the bill voted down by the male-dominated Senate on religious and cultural grounds, but a male senator went further to explain why the bill was unacceptable.

He stated: "From an Islamic perspective, which is a socio-cultural practice of Muslims... equating opportunities for women and men actually infringes on the provisions of the Quran and also the Bible...and for that reason, I don't support this bill."[54]

This imbalance is partly driven by research that shows women as less competent in leadership or technical roles than men. Such perceptions have contributed to

52 Etim-James, G. (2024, August).THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE AND RELIGION ON GENDER INEQUALITY AND IT IMPLICATIONS ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT. WUKARI INTERNATIONAL STUDIES JOURNAL, 8(5).

53 United Nations. (n.d.). Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/

54 Iroanusi, Q. (2021, December). Again, gender equality bill suffers setback at senate. Premium Times. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/500980-again-gender-equality-bill-suffers-setback-at-senate.html

discrimination in hiring and promotion[55], as well as the channelling of women into certain professions. These biases sometimes originate in cultural traditions, societal values, religious teachings, and everyday practices.

Also, from early childhood, boys are often assumed to be assertive, competitive, and public-facing, and therefore groomed to be independent, while these traits are discouraged in girls. Instead, the female child is groomed to be submissive in public and active only in domestic affairs. This social conditioning not only affects how others perceive women in leadership but also how women perceive themselves.[56]

As a result, many capable women experience impostor syndrome, hesitation, or a reluctance to assert themselves in public spheres. Even when they do pursue leadership roles, they often encounter bias or hostility from the public, who may view their ambition as unnatural or culturally inappropriate.[57]

Mrs. Lati Watila, an indigene of Hawul Local Government Area in Borno State, contested for a House of Representatives seat in 2015 under the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP). During her campaign, she faced severe humiliation from male politicians, who hurled insults at her, branding her a prostitute and questioning why she was campaigning instead of staying in her husband's house to cook and take care of the children. This experience reflects the deeply ingrained gender stereotypes that women in politics are forced to confront.[58]

55 Forbes Business Council. (2023, March 13). Five reasons why we don't see more women in leadership roles. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesbusinesscouncil/2023/03/13/five-reasons-why-we-dont-see-more-women-in-leadership-roles/

56 United Way. (n.d.). How gender norms impact us all. https://unitedwaynca.org/blog/gender-norms/

57 St. Catherine University. (2021, March). How to overcome impostor syndrome. https://www.stkate.edu/academics/women-in-leadership-degrees/impostor-syndrome-women

58 Mezie-Okoye. C. (2024, December). Political violence and women's participation in Nigerian politics. Sapientia Foundation Journal of Education, Sciences and Gender Studies, 6(4). https://www.sfjesgs.com/index.php/SFJESGS/article/viewFile/601/599

5.6. Widespread Violence and Harassment

Widespread violence and harassment remain one of the barriers to women's effective representation in government. Beyond physical intimidation during elections, women in politics are also subjected to institutionalised harassment and reprisals when they challenge entrenched power structures.

A striking example occurred in July 2025, when Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan was suspended from the National Assembly for six months after accusing Senate President Godswill Akpabio of sexual harassment. Rather than receiving institutional protection or an impartial investigation, the consequence fell on the accuser, sending a chilling message to other women in politics: that speaking out against abuse could cost them their positions and credibility. Such incidents deepen the climate of fear, silence, and exclusion, reinforcing the perception that political spaces are unsafe and unwelcoming to women.[59]

Election periods in Nigeria are often marred by violence, harassment, and intimidation. Women candidates are disproportionately targeted, facing not only physical threats but also online abuse and smear campaigns that exploit gender stereotypes. During Nigeria's 2019 elections, female candidates reported experiencing higher levels of online abuse, including defamation and discriminatory attacks, than their male counterparts. This hostile digital climate discouraged many women from fully engaging in online political campaigns. Apart from the three presidential candidates, Remi Sonaya, Oby Ezekwesili, and Eunice Atuejide, most women contesting for political seats avoided active use of social media.[60]

59 BBC News. (2025, July). Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan: Nigerian senator suspended after accusing senate president of harassment. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce3nd8n255wo

60 Uduh, C. (2019, January 30). Women in Nigerian politics – are female candidates facing cyber bullying? Heinrich Böll Stiftung https://ng.boell.org/en/2019/01/30/women-nigerian-politics-–-are-female-candidates-facing-cyber-bullying



06

6. Why Gender Equality in Governance Matters

The persistent underrepresentation of women in governance carries consequences that extend far beyond issues of fairness or equity. It restricts women's ability to shape policies and set governance priorities, resulting in decisions that often overlook or undervalue the needs of half the population. More critically, it undermines the inclusivity and legitimacy of the democratic process itself.

The costs of gender inequality to democracy are significant, such as policy blind spots that ignore gendered dimensions of development. Studies have linked higher women's representation with improved developmental policies (health, education, social protection) and enhanced conflict-resolution outcomes. Women's participation also helps parliaments adopt more holistic and inclusive approaches when formulating policies, ensuring that societal challenges are addressed with broader perspectives and solutions that reflect the needs of diverse groups. [61]



The costs of gender inequality to democracy are significant, such as policy blind spots that ignore gendered dimensions of development.



Also, the active participation of women in governance, especially holding key positions, can increase the public trust in institutions. Although many studies have argued that the presence of women in public office does not have any real effect on corruption, a study by the World Bank concluded that women leaders tend to be more trustworthy and less tolerant of graft, often because they operate under greater scrutiny and are more likely to be held accountable.[62]

61 Hyde, K. C. (2021). Government, healthcare and gender: The impact of female legislators on healthcare expenditure in Latin America and the Caribbean [Master's thesis, KDI School of Public Policy and Management]

62 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2020). The time is now: Addressing the gender dimensions of corruption. https://www.unodc.org/documents/corruption/Publications/2020/THE_TIME_IS_NOW_2020_12_08.pdf

Gender equality in governance is not only a matter of justice but a proven catalyst for sustainable peace and development. Evidence shows that when women participate meaningfully in decision-making and peace processes, outcomes are more inclusive, durable, and representative. A global study on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 found that women's participation increases the likelihood of a peace agreement lasting at least two years by 20% and 15 years by 35%. Also, an analysis of 40 peace processes since the Cold War showed that agreements were more likely when women's groups had a strong influence in negotiations compared to when their influence was weak or absent. These findings show that empowering women in governance strengthens institutions, fosters social cohesion, and contributes to long-term national stability. [63]



A global study on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 found that women's participation increases the likelihood of a peace agreement lasting at least two years by 20% and 15 years by 35%



Women's participation in leadership and decision-making also drives economic growth and business success. A World Economic Forum report showed that a 10% increase in women's parliamentary representation is associated with a 0.7% point increase in GDP growth. This is because they are more likely to support gender equal labour markets, such as paid family leave, pay transparency, and childcare infrastructure. "These policies don't just benefit women; they increase workforce

63 Hyde, K. C. (2021). Government, healthcare and gender: The impact of female legislators on healthcare expenditure in Latin America and the Caribbean [Master's thesis, KDI School of Public Policy and Management]

64 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2020). The time is now: Addressing the gender dimensions of corruption. https://www.unodc.org/documents/corruption/Publications/2020/THE_TIME_IS_NOW_2020_12_08.pdf

participation, boost productivity, and fuel economic expansion."[64] Also, a survey conducted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on nearly 13,000 companies in 70 countries shows that companies that practice a culture of gender inclusivity and gender diversity initiatives report improved business outcomes and profits. 75% of the respondents indicated a 10% to 20% increase in profit. When women are given equal opportunities to lead and contribute, businesses become more innovative, competitive, and sustainable.[65]

Research has shown that women in leadership roles often demonstrate higher confidence in managing disruptions and adopting innovative, technology-driven solutions.[66] This is further supported by a Harvard Business Review analysis, which found that women leaders consistently outperform men across key leadership competencies such as initiative, resilience, accountability, and drive for results.[67]

For Nigeria to achieve faster and more inclusive development, it is essential to expand women's participation in decision-making across all sectors of society. Greater involvement of women in governance, business, community leadership, and civic life ensures that policies and strategies reflect the needs and aspirations of the entire population, not just a fraction of it. Empowering women to take active roles in shaping decisions is not only a matter of equity but also a proven driver of economic growth, social cohesion, and sustainable national progress.

65 International Labour Organization (ILO). (2019). Women in business and management: The business case for change. https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_701767/lang--en/index.htm

66 Encompass Equality. (2025, June). *Embracing change: Women in leadership in a disruptive era* [Podcast]. https://www.encompassequality.com/podcast/embracing-change-women-in-leadership-in-a-disruptive-era

67 Zenger, J., & Folkman, J. (2019, June). Research: Women score higher than men in most leadership skills. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2019/06/research-women-score-higher-than-men-in-most-leadership-skills



07

7. Recommendation

As Nigeria approaches the 2027 elections, there is a need for deliberate reforms to expand women's active participation in the political process. This includes increasing the girl child's potential in leadership, reviewing the pathways of increasing women's representation in decision-making positions, encouraging gender inclusive party policies, and promoting female leadership mentorship programs, whether through elections into federal and state positions or through appointments across ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs).

Reform efforts to enhance women's participation in leadership must begin at the foundational level, the family unit. Families play a critical role in shaping attitudes, aspirations, and confidence from an early age. Therefore, deliberate efforts should be made to raise and empower the girl-child to be assertive, confident, and public-facing, with equal opportunities to develop leadership skills alongside her male counterparts. Encouraging families, schools, and communities to nurture leadership qualities in girls will create a strong pipeline of capable women ready to engage in public life and decision-making roles.

According to a report by Plan International, families and communities play a crucial role in shaping girls' leadership ambitions. Their support helps break restrictive stereotypes and build confidence. While not sufficient on its own to remove structural barriers, genuine progress toward gender equality is impossible without it.[68]

68 Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media. (2024). Taking the lead: How family, media, and school shape girls' leadership ambitions. https://geenadavisinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/takingthelead-fullreport.pdf

While the government may view gender quotas as a key strategy for increasing women's representation in governance, this approach alone is insufficient. Quotas should be complemented by comprehensive policies that empower and encourage women to actively contest elections and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. Such policies must go beyond symbolic inclusion to ensure that women's roles in governance are substantive, not merely ceremonial or designed to meet numerical targets.

Limani (2023) in her study of the gender quota implementation in six Western Balkan countries showed that gender quotas can serve as an effective tool for increasing the numerical representation of women in politics, particularly in societies where men have historically dominated the political space, but positions of power and decision-making continues to favour male candidates. It also highlights the potential of quotas to enhance women's presence in key decision-making positions.[69]

For gender quotas to yield meaningful results, implementation must begin at the political party level. Political parties should be mandated to allocate a specific percentage of their candidate slots to women, ensuring that female representation is embedded from the nomination stage. By institutionalising quotas within party structures, women will have a fairer opportunity to contest, gain visibility, and advance through the political hierarchy, transforming quotas from mere symbolic targets into mechanisms for genuine inclusion and leadership development.

Promote structured female leadership mentorship programs aimed at nurturing the next generation of women leaders. Such initiatives should pair emerging women with experienced mentors in politics, business, and public service to build their

69 Limani, A. (2023). The implementation of gender quotas in the Western Balkans: A comparative analysis. Journal of Social and Economic Research. https://www.journalser.com/jester/article/view/25

confidence, skills, and networks. Beyond capacity development, these programs should also serve as platforms to challenge deep-rooted cultural attitudes and societal norms that limit women's leadership potential, fostering a more inclusive and equitable leadership culture.

A Swedish government–funded program aimed at enhancing women's political participation (WPP) across Africa identified peer-to-peer learning and mentorship as key strategies. The initiative engaged 4,742 participants, comprising 3,263 women and 1,479 men. Outcomes from the program showed a 76.4% increase in participants' confidence in political engagement, with 55 women committing to contest in upcoming elections within their respective countries.[70]

By implementing these strategies, Nigeria can move toward a more inclusive and equitable society where women play active roles in governance and decision-making. Strengthening institutional reforms, enforcing party-level quotas, promoting mentorship and leadership programs for women and girls, and addressing gender-based barriers will not only advance representation but also enhance the quality of governance. When women are empowered to lead, policies become more responsive, communities more resilient, and development outcomes more sustainable. Ultimately, fostering gender inclusion is not just a matter of equity, it is a strategic investment in Nigeria's democratic and socio-economic progress.

70 Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). (2023). Enhancing women's political participation in Africa. https://openaid.se/en/contributions/SE-0-SE-6-10988



08

8. Conclusion

Gender disparity in Nigeria's governance systems is not merely a gap in numbers; it is a structural and systemic deficiency that undermines democratic legitimacy, weakens institutional performance, and limits the nation's developmental potential. The persistent underrepresentation of women in decision-making is both a symptom and a driver of wider inequalities in education, economic participation, healthcare, and political access. These disparities are sustained by deep-rooted cultural norms, socio-economic barriers, and historical legacies, as well as external influences that have reshaped gender dynamics over time.

Addressing this imbalance is not an act of benevolence, but a strategic necessity for building a stronger, fairer democracy. Democracies flourish when they draw from the full spectrum of talent, perspectives, and experiences within their populations. Excluding half of the citizenry from meaningful political participation inevitably produces narrower policies, weaker accountability, and diminished public trust.

Real progress requires a multi-pronged approach: reforming institutions, challenging discriminatory norms, embedding gender equity into law and policy, and ensuring that women have the resources, skills, and opportunities to lead. Political will is essential, as is sustained public engagement to dismantle the barriers that have persisted for generations.

Nigeria's democratic future depends on its ability to transform rhetoric into tangible action, shifting from symbolic gestures of inclusion to substantive power-sharing and equal participation. Bridging gender disparities will not only uphold democratic ideals but will also enhance governance outcomes, drive socio-economic progress, and ensure that the nation's development reflects the voices and needs of all its citizens.

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