

Public Perception of the Effectiveness of Television in Covering Female Contestants in Elections (A Study of Akure Metropolis and the 2019 General Elections)

Bejide, Oluwatoyin Abiola; Ajayi, Olutayo James; Fatukasi Olasunkami

Nigeria

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Abstract: This study examines public perception of television's role in covering female political contestants during the 2019 general elections in Akure Metropolis. Specifically, it investigates how the general public perceived the media's coverage of female candidates and assesses the extent to which television emphasized women's political participation during the electoral period. Grounded in Agenda-Setting Theory, the study employed a survey research design to collect data from a representative sample of respondents. Findings indicate that media campaigns during the 2019 elections were largely characterized by persuasive political rhetoric, ethnic bias, and personality-focused narratives. Moreover, a significant proportion of respondents expressed a negative perception of television coverage of female contestants, suggesting a persistent gender gap in political media representation. The study recommends that media organizations give greater visibility to women's political engagement, both as candidates and supporters. It also advocates for the integration of gender sensitivity and media literacy into higher education curricula as a strategy to foster long-term social awareness and promote inclusive democratic practices.

Keywords: Female Contestants, Elections, Media Perception, Television Coverage, Gender Representation.

INTRODUCTION

Elections are structured processes through which individuals are selected to occupy public office. Since the 17th century, elections have become the cornerstone of modern representative democracies. Nigeria, as a democratic nation, boasts a vibrant media landscape that has been active for over 150 years. Both public and private media organizations—across print, broadcast, and digital platforms—contribute to this dynamic environment. As the fourth estate of the realm, the Nigerian media play a crucial role in educating and informing the electorate about the electoral process, including legal frameworks, party campaigns, voter registration, the importance of peaceful elections, and the promotion of transparency and accountability in governance. By fostering public awareness and civic participation, the media help to ensure the credibility and acceptability of election outcomes.

In support of democratic consolidation, it is essential for the media to deliver balanced, conflict-sensitive coverage that promotes an informed citizenry and strengthens democratic accountability. Umechukwu (2004) notes that women comprise over half of the world's population and play indispensable roles in societal development. Typically, women serve in multiple capacities—as mothers, producers, homemakers, community organizers, and socio-political activists. Despite their significant contributions, debates continue about women's participation in Nigerian politics. Many argue that prevailing cultural values, gender norms, and traditional beliefs have marginalized women, reinforcing their subordinate status within the political system.

This marginalization can be traced back to colonialism. The imposition of Western patriarchal ideologies through colonial administrative structures reinforced male dominance in public

life. The 1922 Sir Hugh Clifford Constitution exemplified this by disenfranchising women and restricting political participation to affluent men. Although gender inequality existed in pre-colonial Nigeria, the colonial experience exacerbated it. Historically, women in Yoruba societies held influential positions such as *Iyalode*, *Iyaloja*, *Iyalaje*, and even participated in kingship structures. Yet, under colonial rule, they were stripped of political rights even though they continued to exercise cultural authority in their communities.

Today, the inclusion of women in Nigerian politics remains largely superficial. While the constitution does not explicitly bar women from political participation, systemic barriers persist. The mass media play an instrumental role in shaping public perception, framing political discourse, and highlighting key electoral issues. According to Language and Language (1999), the media help define the tone, focus, and critical fault lines of each political campaign.

It is vital to acknowledge that democratic governance cannot be fully realized without the meaningful involvement of women in policymaking and leadership roles. Women's active engagement strengthens democracy by promoting equity, expanding the scope of human rights, and empowering marginalized voices. It enables collective action among women's groups and advances their civil, economic, and social rights. Consequently, women must not only participate in governance but also ensure that their concerns are represented and addressed beyond relying solely on government structures.

One of the primary impediments to women's political participation in Nigeria is their underrepresentation in decision-making. The United Nations (2011) asserts that gender inequality in political leadership remains a significant obstacle to democratic development. Although women constitute a majority of the Nigerian population (Afolabi et al., 2008), their political accomplishments are frequently overlooked or minimized. As Ekundayo (2004) points out, despite numerical superiority, Nigerian women have limited access to leadership and decision-making positions.

Despite constitutional guarantees of equal rights, Nigerian women have historically faced limited opportunities for political participation. Provisions within the 1999 Constitution specifically Sections 40, 42(1), and 77(2) prohibit discrimination based on sex. However, the political environment continues to foster structural inequalities that deny women access to decision-making positions. This institutional exclusion has significantly shaped women's perceptions of politics and contributed to their persistently low levels of political representation.

Nigerian women's political engagement can be broadly divided into three historical phases: pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial.

Pre-Colonial Era

In pre-colonial Nigeria, women played prominent roles in governance and leadership. Historical figures such as Queen Amina of Zaria, Princess Moremi of Ife, Princess Inikpi of Igala, Iyalode Efunsetan Aniwura of Ibadan, and Emotan of Benin exemplify women's active contributions to community defense, governance, and state-building (Awe, 1992). Women held political and spiritual offices, organized migrations, built cities, and led conquests. Among the Yoruba, women held institutional positions such as the *Iyalode*, a powerful representative of women in the council of state until at least 1874. Similarly, the *Umu-Ada* among the Igbo played crucial roles in decision-making. According to Afolabi (2013), these roles underscore women's direct and indirect participation in governance and conflict resolution, highlighting their centrality in maintaining social order and political cohesion.

Colonial Era (1860–1960)

Colonialism marked a significant decline in women's political agency. After the 1914 Amalgamation, British colonial authorities institutionalized male dominance by recognizing only male traditional rulers as native authorities. As Mba (1997) argues, colonial policies deliberately excluded women from governance, reversing the achievements of the pre-colonial era. This led to widespread marginalization and disenfranchisement of women, resulting in loss of power, economic isolation, and political invisibility.

Nevertheless, Nigerian women responded with resistance and activism. The Aba Women's Riot of 1929 is a notable example of mass protest against colonial taxation and administrative injustice (Ikpe, 1997). Throughout the colonial period, women formed influential political organizations such as:

- **The Lagos Women's League**, which advocated for education and public health;
- **The Women's Party** (founded in 1944), which promoted welfare and gender equality;
- **The Abeokuta Women's Union**, which evolved into the Nigerian Women's Union in 1949 (Mba, 2001).

Prominent figures such as Margaret Ekpo, Lady Abayomi, Mrs. Kutu, and Hajia Gambo Sawaba led political mobilization and contested elective offices. Margaret Ekpo, for instance, won a seat in the Eastern House of Assembly during the 1953/54 elections and contributed to constitutional reforms.

Post-Colonial and Democratic Eras

Following independence in 1960, women's political participation witnessed a decline due to the rise of ethnic-based

party politics and patriarchal political structures. Post-independence politics became increasingly violent and exclusionary, deterring broad-based women's participation (Ikpe, 1997). Despite these challenges, a few women—such as Mrs. Bernice Kerry, Wuraola Esan, and Janet Muokelu—secured legislative seats at the regional and federal levels (Mba, 2001).

During the Second Republic (1979–1983), under President Shehu Shagari, some women engaged in party politics through platforms like the NPN and UPN. However, of the 475 senatorial candidates, only four were women—and none were elected. At the House of Representatives level, only two women won seats, and five others were elected to state assemblies (Mba, 1982).

The return to democratic rule in 1999 rekindled hope for inclusive governance. Yet, despite notable efforts by female aspirants, political representation of women has remained minimal. The 2019 general elections revealed persistent gender disparities. Of the 73 political parties that contested the presidential race, only six fielded female presidential candidates, and 22 nominated women as vice-presidential candidates. Out of 1,904 senatorial candidates, only 234 were women (12%). Similarly, in the House of Representatives elections, only 543 of the 4,680 candidates (12%) were women (INEC, 2019).

This trend is troubling, especially considering the intensified advocacy and awareness campaigns promoting gender equality. Despite widespread mobilization, women's underrepresentation suggests deep-seated structural and cultural barriers that hinder their full political inclusion.

Although there has been growing awareness of women's importance in national development, achieving gender parity in political participation remains a distant goal. The mass media, especially television, play a critical role in shaping public opinion, setting agendas, and framing the political narratives that influence societal attitudes toward female politicians. This study investigates the public perception of television coverage of female contestants in Nigeria's 2019 general elections, focusing on Akure Metropolis. It explores how the media's portrayal of women may have contributed to their continued marginalization, despite their active involvement in the electoral process.

Statement of the Problem

Despite ongoing efforts to promote gender equality, the goal of achieving gender balance in Nigerian politics remains elusive. Male dominance continues to pervade most political positions, often upheld by informal, politically manipulated structures that disadvantage qualified women. This systemic imbalance not

only impedes political development but also affects national progress and undermines democratic sustainability.

Women who aspire to political office encounter numerous barriers. These include limited access to campaign funding, discriminatory party zoning arrangements, lower levels of formal education, and deep-rooted cultural and religious constraints. Historically, this marginalization can be traced to colonial legacies, as Nigerian women were not granted voting rights until 1976. While there has been modest progress—particularly since the 2007 general elections—sexism and patriarchal biases continue to hinder female political participation. As a result, women are often perceived as political outsiders or tokens, with their marginalization linked to economic, social, and ideological inequalities.

The mass media, recognized as a critical pillar of democracy, plays an essential role in shaping public discourse, educating citizens, and framing political narratives. Through political campaigns and civic education programs—such as “one man, one vote”—the media can significantly influence electoral behavior and public opinion. However, the degree to which the media has actively promoted the political inclusion of women remains questionable, especially in the context of election coverage. This study, therefore, seeks to evaluate the role of television in covering female contestants during the 2019 general elections in Akure Metropolis.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the nature of political campaigns conducted by the mass media in the 2019 general elections.
- ii. To assess public perceptions of the effectiveness of television coverage of female contestants during the elections.
- iii. To analyze the extent of prominence given to female candidates in television media coverage during the 2019 general elections.

Research Questions

- i. What was the nature of political campaigns conducted by the mass media during the 2019 general elections?
- ii. How does the public perceive the effectiveness of television in covering female contestants during the 2019 elections?
- iii. To what extent did television coverage highlight or prioritize female candidates in the 2019 general elections?

Literature Review

The Concept of Women's Political Participation

Politics encompasses the processes through which individuals share ideas, compete for leadership, and exert authority within

a state. In Nigeria, women—like their male counterparts—aspire to wield political influence through representation and participation. According to Alapiki (2010), women in leadership positions globally help redefine political priorities, introduce new issues into political discourse, and bring alternative perspectives to mainstream debates.

Since Nigeria's independence, women's participation in politics has gradually increased, though marginally. Most women engage at the voter registration and ballot-casting levels. Former President Goodluck Jonathan once remarked that women's voting power could decisively influence election outcomes, given their numerical strength (Punch, July 27, 2012). Yet, critics such as Rousseau, Hobbes, and Plato historically questioned women's inclusion in political spaces, often on cultural or philosophical grounds.

Nigeria's struggle to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is partly attributed to the persistent underrepresentation of women in governance. The 2006 National Gender Policy recognizes that women's empowerment and gender equality are critical to achieving these goals. Nigerian women remain especially vulnerable to poverty, disease, environmental degradation, and conflict. Their inclusion in governance is, therefore, not merely a rights issue but a developmental imperative.

Empowering women particularly through education yields broad societal benefits, such as reducing child mortality, improving public health outcomes, and ensuring environmental sustainability. Educated and politically active women contribute significantly to future generations and their communities. Therefore, women's empowerment is synonymous with sustainable development.

Female participation in governance enhances political quality and contributes to national progress. Women are known to advocate for redistributive policies that emphasize education, healthcare, and social welfare (Clots-Figueras, 2011). According to the Gender Report (2012), an increase in female political representation correlates with more equitable resource allocation and improved human development outcomes. Nigeria's historical record includes women who have made substantial contributions to national development, affirming the importance of inclusive governance.

Bari (2005) observes that in countries where women's parliamentary representation exceeds 33%, the majority fall under the high human development index category. Despite their nurturing roles within families and communities, Nigerian women remain underrepresented in governance structures. Most attain political office through appointments rather than elections. For example, under President Obasanjo, women held 10% of political appointments, rising to 33% under President Jonathan, but declining again under President Buhari to below

16%. Even when appointed, many operate within patriarchal frameworks and often lack the political autonomy enjoyed by their male counterparts.

Since Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999, more women have contested political offices, signaling a gradual shift toward greater inclusion.

Women's Political Participation: the Nigerian Experience

Empirical studies indicate that women face systematic marginalization in socio-political and economic spheres globally. Scholars like Agbalajobi (2010) and Kira (2003) attribute this underrepresentation to entrenched cultural stereotypes, religious doctrines, and patriarchal traditions. Approximately 80% of global power structures are male-dominated, relegating women to secondary roles in politics and governance.

Agbalajobi (2010) argues that women face discrimination not only in electoral processes but also in legal and judicial settings. In some instances, Nigerian courts and police stations have disqualified women from acting as sureties solely based on gender—an outright violation of the constitutional principle of equality before the law.

Culturally, women's roles as nurturers are often used to justify their exclusion from politics. Within party structures, they are sometimes seen more as symbolic figures or sex objects than as credible political actors. Marital status is frequently used as a qualification benchmark, placing an added burden on female aspirants. Historically, military regimes and authoritarian governance further stifled women's political inclusion. For example, during the 1975 regime, only two women were appointed as regional commissioners, and no women held federal or state offices during subsequent military administrations (Newman & Fryingly, 1980, as cited in Ebuka, 2009).

The 1999 Constitution drafting process further revealed gender biases, as only five women were included in the 250-member assembly, with limited impact. Earlier initiatives, such as the "Better Life for Rural Women" program (later renamed "Better Life for Rural Dwellers"), demonstrated attempts at inclusion but also highlighted how women's empowerment was often framed within patriarchal contexts.

In the 1993 democratic transition, women's participation was minimal—winning only 206 out of 1,297 local government seats, with no gubernatorial wins. During the acclaimed 1993 presidential election, only three women contested, and the election was later annulled. In 1999, only three women were elected to the Senate and thirteen to the House of

Representatives, with no female presidential or gubernatorial candidates (Tayo, 1999).

The 2019 general elections again highlighted the gender gap. Of 73 political parties, only six fielded female presidential candidates and 22 fielded female vice-presidential candidates, none of whom were elected. Of the 1,904 senatorial aspirants, 234 were women (12%), but only seven were successful. Similarly, only 12 out of 543 female candidates for the House of Representatives won seats (INEC, 2019).

These figures reflect only modest gains. Persistent stereotypes continue to frame women as less suitable for public leadership, reinforcing a political culture that favors men. The limited political presence of women, particularly in elected positions, remains a major challenge in achieving equitable governance in Nigeria.

Women's Participation in the 2019 General Elections

The 2019 general elections in Nigeria presented numerous challenges and left a lasting impact on stakeholders. While some candidates succeeded, many others contested the outcomes in court. However, one of the most concerning developments was the noticeable decline in women's political participation compared to previous electoral cycles. Women were largely marginalized throughout the electoral process, reinforcing the historical trend of male dominance in Nigerian politics.

Since the return to democratic governance in 1999, Nigerian women have consistently contested various political positions. Nevertheless, progress has been slow. The 9th National Assembly illustrates this disparity only seven women out of 109 senators and twelve women out of 360 representatives were elected. Furthermore, none of Nigeria's 36 states had a female governor, and no woman has ever been elected President or Vice President.

These figures are particularly stark when compared to countries like Rwanda, where women hold 58% of parliamentary seats, and Senegal, where 43% of parliamentarians are women. Despite Nigeria's National Gender Policy advocating for 35% affirmative action, actual implementation remains weak.

In the 2019 elections:

- Out of six female presidential candidates, Maina Maimuna Kyari of the NPC received the highest number of votes among women 10,081 votes.
- Cultural stereotypes and entrenched patriarchal beliefs continue to limit women's success at the polls.

- Although women have played critical roles historically in Nigeria's political life, they are still seen primarily as supporters rather than leaders.

Gabriel (2015) highlights how male chauvinism reinforces the perception that governance is a male domain, relegating women to domestic spheres.

Despite numerous awareness campaigns, training seminars, and the formation of advocacy groups such as the Nigerian Women Interparty Forum, the 2019 elections revealed that substantial structural and attitudinal changes are still needed. These disappointing results suggest that gender inclusion in politics requires more than grassroots mobilization it demands systemic policy enforcement and media accountability.

The Media and Women's Participation in Politics

The mass media serve as crucial agents of socialization and political mobilization, influencing how societies understand and engage with political realities. The agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) emphasizes the media's power to shape public discourse by selecting which issues receive attention. Though they may not dictate public opinion, the media determine the issues that dominate public consciousness such as women's inclusion in politics.

In Nigeria, the underrepresentation of women in media narratives remains a significant barrier to their political advancement. Studies reveal that men have greater access to media coverage, often sidelining female voices and reinforcing gender disparities in political visibility. Despite their pivotal role, media platforms often fail to adequately highlight women's contributions or give them fair representation in political debates, interviews, or campaign coverage.

Okunna (1999) asserts that while media may not tell people what to think, they profoundly influence what people think about. Thus, limited or biased coverage of female political candidates diminishes public awareness of their capabilities and platforms.

According to Karl (2010), political development is unattainable without the active participation of all citizens regardless of gender. Yet, Nigerian society often views politics as a male preserve, discouraging women from participating by promoting narratives that tie their identity to domestic roles.

Multiple scholars stress the media's potential as a tool for advocacy and national development:

- **Adegoke (2001)** argues that media should be used to inform and empower citizens by offering balanced coverage on issues of national concern, including gender equality.

- **Nwabueze (2005)** emphasizes the media's mobilizing power, noting that how issues are covered affects public opinion and electoral behavior.
- **Tejumaiye (2005)** adds that media silence or biased reporting can contribute to social unrest, making fair media representation a matter of national importance.

Furthermore, Adu (2008) notes that women constitute approximately 60% of Nigeria's population a demographic reality that makes their political exclusion not only unjust but also a strategic oversight. If the media fail to champion their representation, Nigeria risks continued democratic deficit and stagnated national development.

Theoretical Framework:

Agenda-Setting Theory

The Agenda-Setting Theory posits that the media significantly influence public perception by determining which issues receive attention, thereby shaping the public's sense of priority. As Izuogu (2009) explains, the media do not necessarily dictate *what* people should think, but rather *what* they should think about. This subtle but powerful influence determines the salience of issues in public discourse.

Anyadike (2009) expands on this, noting that the media's role includes reshaping societal norms, perceptions, and values by emphasizing certain topics over others. The media's selection, framing, and repetition of stories can reinforce existing narratives or introduce new ones thereby affecting how audiences interpret social issues such as gender inequality in politics.

The theory's relevance to this study lies in its emphasis on the media's ability to spotlight or marginalize topics. By prioritizing coverage of female political participation, media platforms can influence public awareness and encourage conversations around gender representation, electoral fairness, and policy inclusion. Formats such as news reports, interviews, panel discussions, editorials, and documentaries are especially effective in shaping attitudes toward women in politics.

In the context of Nigeria's 2019 general elections, the application of agenda-setting theory underscores the need for consistent, focused media coverage that challenges harmful stereotypes, mobilizes citizen support for female candidates, and pressures policymakers to uphold inclusive democratic values. When gender-related political issues are continuously featured in the media, they become part of the public consciousness, thus driving social and political change.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a survey research design with an emphasis on audience analysis. According to Nworgu (1991), survey research involves studying a representative sample of a population by collecting and analyzing data from selected individuals. Okoro (2001) adds that it entails gathering information through instruments such as questionnaires or interviews, followed by statistical analysis to draw conclusions and suggest solutions to identified problems. The survey design is suitable for this study as it allows the researcher to obtain firsthand insights into public perceptions regarding the media's coverage of female political candidates during the 2019 general elections.

Population of the Study

The population refers to the aggregate of elements or individuals to which the findings of a study are generalized (Nworgu, 1991). Obaze and Onosu (2009) define population as a theoretically defined collection of units or elements relevant to a research inquiry. Based on this understanding, the population for this study comprises women residing in Akure Metropolis, Ondo State, Nigeria. According to the National Population Commission (2006), the estimated female population in Akure is approximately 201,500.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

Given the large size of the population, the study employed a purposive sampling technique to select participants. Ikeagwu (1998) explains that purposive sampling involves deliberately selecting individuals who possess specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. In this study, the focus was on women who participated in or were eligible to participate in the 2019 general elections.

To ensure adequate representation, a sample size of 400 respondents was selected. This size was deemed sufficient for generating meaningful insights into women's political engagement and their perception of television coverage during the elections.

Instrument for Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative data on the following:

- Respondents' exposure to political campaigns via television.

- Perceptions of media effectiveness in covering female candidates.
- Evaluation of the prominence given to women in media coverage during the 2019 elections.

The use of a structured questionnaire ensured consistency in responses and facilitated efficient data collection.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using simple percentage analysis, with results presented in tables for

clarity and ease of interpretation. This method was chosen for its simplicity and effectiveness in identifying trends and patterns in public opinion without requiring advanced statistical procedures.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents and analyzes data obtained from the respondents through structured questionnaires. The analysis is organized according to the three research questions posed in the study.

Table 1: Exposure to Political Campaigns in the 2019 General Elections

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	380	100%
No	0	0%
Total	380	100%

Interpretation:

All respondents (100%) confirmed that they were exposed to political campaigns via various mass media platforms in the

build-up to the 2019 general elections. This high exposure suggests that mass media played a significant role in political communication during the election period.

Table 2: Nature of Political Campaigns Conducted by the Mass Media

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Persuasive messages full of promises	115	30%
Marginalized campaigns	104	27%
Information devoid of true details	65	17%
Tribalized campaigns	82	22%
Personality-based	14	4%
Total	380	100%

Interpretation:

The findings reveal that political campaigns disseminated through mass media were primarily characterized by persuasive messaging full of promises (30%), tribalized content (22%), and marginalized or selective campaign messages (27%). A smaller proportion of respondents identified personality-driven

and superficial campaign messages. These results indicate that the campaigns lacked issue-based content and were more rhetorical than informative.

Research Question 2: What is the public perception of the effectiveness of television in covering female contestants in the 2019 general elections?

Table 3: Perception of Media Effectiveness in Covering Female Contestants

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	125	33%
No	255	67%
Total	380	100%

Interpretation:

A majority of the respondents (67%) perceived the media particularly television as ineffective in covering female

contestants during the 2019 general elections. Only 33% believed the media provided effective coverage.

Table 4: Rating of Media Effectiveness in Covering Female Contestants

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Excellent	32	8%
Good	15	4%
Moderate	78	21%
Poor	83	22%
Very Poor	172	45%
Total	380	100%

Interpretation:

The overall perception of media effectiveness was negative. A combined 67% of respondents rated the coverage as poor or very poor, with 45% describing it as very poor. Only a minority (12%) considered the coverage to be good or excellent. This

underscores the perceived inadequacy of television media in promoting gender-balanced political discourse.

Research Question 3: What is the degree of prominence apportioned to media coverage of female candidates in the 2019 general elections?

Table 5: Perception of Time Allocated to Female Candidates

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	120	32%
No	260	68%
Total	380	100%

Interpretation:

A substantial 68% of respondents believed that the media did not allocate enough time to covering female candidates during

the 2019 elections. This suggests a perceived bias in media attention favoring male candidates.

Table 6: Perception of Detail in Media Coverage of Women's Participation

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	112	29%
No	268	71%
Total	380	100%

Interpretation:

The majority (71%) of respondents stated that media coverage of women's participation in the 2019 elections lacked sufficient detail. This reflects a significant gap in how female political actors were portrayed or represented in the media landscape.

Discussion of Findings

1. Nature of Political Campaigns

The study revealed that all respondents (100%) were exposed to political campaigns via mass media during the 2019 general elections. However, the nature of these campaigns was predominantly persuasive and rhetorical, with messages focused on promises of development, tribalized appeals, and personality-driven narratives. This aligns with existing literature on Nigerian political communication, which often emphasizes superficial promises and ethnic affiliations over issue-based, policy-oriented campaigns.

Such approaches undermine democratic engagement, particularly for marginalized groups like women, whose substantive policy concerns are frequently sidelined in favor of populist rhetoric and identity politics. The media, rather than functioning as a neutral platform for issue-focused discourse, appear complicit in perpetuating these campaign styles.

2. Public Perception of Media Effectiveness in Covering Female Contestants

Findings show that a significant 67% of respondents perceived the media as ineffective in covering female contestants during the 2019 elections. Furthermore, 45% rated the coverage as "very poor," while only 12% offered a positive assessment (rating it "good" or "excellent").

This perception points to a continued gender imbalance in political communication. Despite increased efforts by advocacy groups and media campaigns promoting women's political involvement, media coverage remains disproportionately

focused on male candidates. The result is a reinforcement of patriarchal norms that marginalize women's voices in electoral politics.

These findings are consistent with the agenda-setting theory, which posits that the media may not dictate what people think, but strongly influence what they think about. The limited visibility of female candidates in political coverage diminishes public attention to women's political potential and discourages broader female participation.

3. Degree of Prominence Given to Female Candidates

A majority of respondents indicated that insufficient time and detail were allocated to the coverage of female candidates. Specifically, 68% believed the media did not apportion enough airtime, and 71% reported that media coverage lacked depth regarding women's participation in the 2019 elections.

This lack of prominence reflects a systemic neglect of women in the political space, where media framing continues to favor male narratives. Such marginalization undermines both the National Gender Policy, which advocates for 35% representation of women in decision-making, and the broader democratic principle of equal political opportunity.

The failure of the media to foreground women's issues, experiences, and qualifications in electoral coverage suggests that the media's potential as a vehicle for social change and political inclusion remains underutilized. Effective media engagement is essential not only for voter education but also for reshaping societal perceptions that confine women to domestic roles.

In summary, the findings underscore the inadequacy of media representation of female political actors during the 2019 elections. Despite their significant role in electoral processes, women remain underrepresented in media discourse and elective positions, due in part to the way media frames political narratives. Addressing this imbalance is vital for strengthening

Nigeria's democratic framework and achieving gender-inclusive governance.

Summary

The persistent underrepresentation of women in Nigeria's democratic processes presents a critical barrier to inclusive national development. A confluence of factors—including entrenched patriarchal norms, socio-cultural stereotypes, limited educational opportunities, and restricted access to economic resources continues to hinder women's full political participation. Although there is growing awareness and advocacy for gender equity, women's electoral success remains minimal. Societal perceptions that frame politics as a male-dominated domain further exacerbate this challenge.

To reverse this trend, both media institutions and policy frameworks must play more proactive roles. Enhanced and strategic media coverage, coupled with targeted political reforms, is essential to fostering an environment in which women are not only visible but also viable participants in Nigeria's democratic space. Empowering women through political inclusion enables them to contribute meaningfully to governance and national development—as both nurturers in the home and as leaders in society.

Conclusion

The study clearly demonstrates that the media's coverage of female candidates during the 2019 general elections was largely inadequate, lacking both prominence and depth. The majority of media reports were limited to brief, surface-level news stories, with minimal use of in-depth formats such as documentaries, panel discussions, or investigative features. This superficial approach signals a lack of prioritization of women's political involvement within mainstream media narratives.

In light of the agenda-setting theory, which emphasizes the media's influence on public discourse and perception, the failure to amplify women's political voices perpetuates gender biases and limits public engagement with female candidates. For Nigeria to achieve meaningful gender equality and democratic inclusiveness, the media must intentionally amplify women's political roles and contributions.

Recommendations

1. Enhanced Media Engagement

Media organizations should deliberately increase the visibility of female political actors through strategic

content such as feature stories, documentaries, analytical segments, and expert interviews to inform the public, reshape stereotypes, and normalize women's leadership in politics.

2. Educational Reforms

Integrate gender sensitivity, media literacy, and civic education into the national education curriculum, especially at tertiary levels, to cultivate a generation of citizens who recognize the value of gender-inclusive governance.

3. Policy Advocacy and Political Will

Political parties, civil society organizations, and NGOs should launch sustained advocacy campaigns encouraging women's participation in elections. Such efforts should highlight constitutional guarantees of equality and aim to dismantle party-level barriers to women's candidacy.

4. Legal and Institutional Mechanisms

The government should enforce and expand affirmative action policies to ensure equitable representation of women in governance. Additionally, legal protections should be strengthened to eliminate cultural, religious, and socio-political practices that marginalize women in politics.

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