

MASS MEDIA MOBILISATION AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN NIGERIAN POLITICS FROM 1999-2019: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract

Women's participation in politics is one of the major concerns of developing countries. The inadequate representation of women in politics has led to their interests and expectations being relegated to the background. However, since women constitute almost half of the Nigerian population, their interests should be protected and their views expressed. The mass media as agents of social mobilisation have significant roles to play in the development of women towards participation in politics. Therefore, this research sought to find out if the media are capable of and how they can influence women's participation in politics in Nigeria. The study employed the survey research design. Findings indicated, inter alia, that mass media misrepresentation of women constitutes one of the major barriers to women's participation in politics, and one of the major ways the mass media can mobilise women to participate in politics is by educating them on political participation. In the light of the findings, the study recommended that the mass media should strengthen their mechanism for balance with respect to gender-based reporting and expand their reach to women in rural areas, ensuring that political education is accessible to them.

Key words: Nigeria; Gender; Politics; Mass media; Mobilisation; Representation

Background of the Study

Nigeria returned to a democratic political dispensation in 1999 after 16 years of uninterrupted military dictatorship. Since then, elections have been held every four years to select leaders across the 36 states and Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. As the most populous country in black Africa, Nigeria's elections reverberate not just within the country but across other African countries and the world at large. Electioneering campaigns and elections in Nigeria are more often than not characterised by all sorts of violence and crime. In fact, "Nigeria's politics from independence has been tumultuous. Violence has continued to mar the conduct of... elections in the country (Ojo, 2014 as cited in Ohaja, 2015a). More worrisome is the perpetual neglect and relegation of women to the background when it comes to politics and the process of electing leaders in Nigeria.

The term, "politics", is used to describe all activities directly or indirectly associated with the governance of a country. Politics, according to Lasswell (1963), "determines who gets what, when and why". The essence of political participation in any society, whether civilised or primitive is to seek acquisition and dispensing of power to organise society, harness and distribute resources and to influence decision-making in line with individual interests (Arowolo & Abe, 2008). Political participation plays a vital role in the promotion of democratic governance, the rule of law, social inclusion and economic development, as well as in the advancement of all human rights.

Comparatively, the rate at which men participate in politics is incredibly higher than their female counterparts. Although there has been a progressive increase in the trend of women's participation in politics, it has been more in the areas of appointments and not in contesting elections. Their political participation in Nigeria is considered very low considering the international benchmark of 30% (Omoniyi, 2012) even when the ability of women in organising the society and more importantly in governance cannot be underestimated or overlooked. Regrettably, the political environment in Nigeria is dominated by men, leaving women severely marginalised and disadvantaged. Women are often relegated to the background when it comes to political involvement. The widespread misconception that women should be just followers and supporters in the political scheme, only to be seen and not heard and that the game of politics is reserved for the men has negatively influenced Nigerian women's interest in politics (Ohaja, 2013).

In spite of some efforts that are being carried out to encourage women's participation in politics and also to debunk myths that pose as barriers; and the very fact that the population of women in Nigeria is higher than that of male folk, women's representation in Nigerian politics is still far lower than men's. Some of the programmes aimed at encouraging women's participation in Nigerian politics are the Young Women in Politics Forum (YWiPF) that was launched in September 2017 under the auspices of the Nigerian Women Trust Fund (NUTF) and The National Democratic Institute (NDI), which also organise seminars and workshops on women in politics in various states of the federation among others.

Since 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic rule, Nigerian women have made efforts to gain access to political decision-making positions by contesting for elective positions at various levels but their efforts have not translated into appreciable results as election outcomes since 1999 have revealed (Olatunji, 2018). Women seem to feature more in other

aspects of political participation like voting, organising rallies and mobilising other women and youths to vote for male candidates than contesting and winning elections themselves (Ohaja, 2013).

The mass media and politics go hand in hand as both institutions depend on each other for their respective functioning. As Uwakwe (2017) puts it, modern politics cannot function without the mass media. Active participation in politics by women cannot be achieved without proper communication. Communication serves as a vehicle through which different segments of people relate with each other. It is a means for dispensing information capable of transforming or influencing people's approaches to issues. Effective communication in a political system can only be achieved through the mass media. The mass media have the potential to assist in the constant promotion of women's participation in politics by planning and mounting messages and sustainable enlightenment campaigns for general awareness about the leadership qualities of women and their role in sustainable development in Nigeria (Nwammo, 2012, cited in Ezugwu 2016).

Regrettably, Patrick and Ekpenyong, (2015) opine that the Nigerian media are guilty of misrepresenting the womenfolk. Most critics view them as agents working for the reinforcement of female stereotyping and marginalisation in the society. Also, the Institute for Media and Society (2015) notes that in all facets of media reportage of the 2015 general elections, female politicians were seriously relegated to the background by newspapers, radio and television stations (Olatunj, 2018). Thus, there is much evidence to suggest that the mass media are part of the reasons behind low women's mobilisation and representation as they play prominent roles in projecting the political ambitions of the male folk more than the females.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research are to:

1. Determine if the mass media are capable of influencing women's political participation in Nigeria.
2. Identify factors responsible for perceived low participation of women in politics.
3. To ascertain the ways the mass media can mobilise women in the forthcoming 2023 general elections.

Overview of Women's Political Participation in 1999 – 2019 General Elections

The society comprises both men and women, therefore, it presupposes that both should be equal partners in the political process. This presumption is based on the principle of democracy that emphasises equal representation of all interest groups in the political environment. Dahl (1971) in Okeke (2015, p. 391) opines that the "Key characteristic of a democracy is the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals". Low representation of women in politics in Nigeria, as a democratic state, is considered a violation of this principle. Oluyemi (2016) points out that the return of democracy in May 29, 1999 gave hope for a new dawn in the struggle for more participation of women in Nigerian politics. Nigeria is under its sixth administration since the inception of democracy in 1999 and while democratic transition has created openings that encourage equal representation, it is still evident that women's involvement in Nigerian politics is low, as results and statistical data from 1999 till date have shown.

Omolara (2015), in her review of women’s participation in the 2015 general elections, notes that since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigerian women have tried to gain access to political decision-making positions by contesting for elective positions at various levels and based on results from elections held since 1999 their efforts have not been very successful. Women are still highly marginalised considering the disparity in the proportion of men to women in leadership and decision-making positions (Omolara, 2015). For instance, Nigeria has not produced a female president or vice president in its political history. Examining the period since the return of democracy following many years of military rule, President Obasanjo occupied the office of president between 1999 and 2007. He handed over power to President Umaru Musa Yar’adua in 2007 and in 2010, President Goodluck Jonathan assumed office after the death of Yar’adua until 2015. President Muhammadu Buhari came into power in 2015 and retained his position after the 2019 polls.

The position of vice president in Nigeria followed the same trend as that of the president. Four males have occupied the seat since the return of democracy in 1999. In the history of Nigeria, no female has ever been elected governor. The first and only female governor the country has had was Mrs. Virginia Etiaba and she was appointed governor of Anambra State in 2006, following the impeachment of Peter Obi who was the then governor of the state. Her reign lasted only three months. The National Assembly has also been dominated by men. In 1999, there were only three women out of the 109 members of the Senate while in 2007, the number increased to four, nine in 2007, seven in 2011 another seven in 2015 and seven again in 2019. The number of women in the House of Representatives in 1999 was 12, out of the 360 members. That number increased to 23 in 2003, 27 in 2007, declined to 26 in 2011, 20 in 2015 and 11 in 2019. As Ohaja (2012) shows, this lopsided representation of women in elective positions is reflected all the way from the national to the local government level. The table below presents the data for the number of women in elected positions since 1999.

Table 1 – Number of women in elected positions since 1999

		1999	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019
Office	No. of seats available	Women	Women	Women	Women	Women	Women
President	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vice president	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Senate	109	3	4	9	7	7	7
House of Rep.	360	12	23	27	26	20	11
Governor	36	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dep. Governor	36	1	2	6	3	6	4
State HA	990	12	38	54	62	-	40

Source: The Guardian online, 2018, July 12 and Premium Times Online, 2019 April 20

Women have persistently cried marginalisation when it comes to clinching electoral offices. However, many of them have remained undeterred, endlessly making moves to contest and win important positions. There are prominent female politicians that have left their marks on the Nigerian political scene and serve as role models to younger female politicians. The most outstanding of them is Sarah Jubril, who has vied for the presidency five times and served as a Special Adviser on Ethics and Values to President Goodluck Jonathan (Okonkwo, 2019).

A handful of other women have occupied important and key administrative and political positions since 1999. Among them is Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala who served as Minister of Finance of Nigeria for two terms (2003-2007, 2011-2015) under the leadership of President Obasanjo and President Jonathan respectively. She also served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs and was the first female to hold both positions. As the Co-ordinating Minister of the Economy and Minister of Finance, Dr. Okonjo-Iweala oversaw an 89.2% jump in Nigeria's GDP from \$285.56 billion to \$508.9 billion in 2013, making the country the largest economy in Africa and the 26th largest in the world (Patterson, 2014). Another one of her major achievements was her negotiations with the Paris Club of Creditors that led to the wiping out of US\$30 billion of Nigeria's debt (Omodia, Esidene & Abdul, 2013). She introduced the practice of publishing each state's monthly financial allocation from the Federal Government of Nigeria in the newspapers and this singular action went a long way in increasing transparency in governance. She also contributed to the fuel subsidy removal policy by the Nigerian government, and in May 2016, the new Nigerian administration announced it had removed the fuel subsidy after it became apparent that it was unsustainable and inefficient.

Similarly, Professor Dora Akunyili served as head of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) from 2001 to 2008 and contributed her own quota to the Nigerian economy and politics by waging a war on fake food and drug products. The importation of counterfeit drugs, particularly from Asian countries to the Nigerian market reduced considerably during her time in office.

Other Nigerian female politicians who have inscribed their names on the sands of time include Mrs. Oluremi Sonaiya, who was the only female presidential aspirant in the 2015 elections on the platform of the grassroots KOWA Party in a crowd of 14 presidential standard bearers and got 13,076 votes. She is currently a leading advocate for gender parity in Nigerian politics. Also on the list are Former Senator Florence Ita Giwa, popularly known as Mama Bakassi and Obiageli Ezekwesili who served as Federal Minister of Solid Minerals and also as Federal Minister of Education. Dr. Ezekweseli also served as Senior Special Assistant to former President Obasanjo on Budget Monitoring and headed the Price Intelligence Unit (otherwise known as Due Process Unit).

In a nutshell, the empirical evidence given above depicts the potency or otherwise of the contribution of women in the transforming of the Nigerian economy and politics in general. It therefore means that women can play active roles in shaping the direction of Nigerian politics even beyond what they have been credited with so far.

Mass Media Representation of Women

The mass media are active agents of political mobilisation and representation, and are capable of deciding what is important and what is not based on the level of emphasis they place on an

issue. According to Patrick and Ekpeyong (2015), the media are considered potent forces that are very active in shaping popular beliefs and perceptions. In other words, the mass media possess spectacular potentials for influencing social attitudes either positively or negatively. Arguing from this premise, the mass media wield the power of socialisation, mass mobilisation and advocacy. Patrick and Ekpeyong (2015) state that one way in which the mass media shape audience perception and attitude is through representation. The mass media, as agents of political representation, have been accused of constantly representing the womenfolk in a negative light and in the process, portraying certain gender roles and stereotypes.

In this view, Oyinade and Daramola (2013, p, 29) state that, “The ability of the media to make or mar the image of women in the society cannot be denied or underestimated. In fact, the United Nations ... listed the media as one of the ten obstacles to women advancement.” They further disclose that a content analysis of main stream media in Nigeria reveals one dominant orientation which is: women are largely seen and not heard. This means that Nigerian women can adorn the pages of newspapers for commercialisation and beauty purposes, but their voices on issues of national and international interest are not heard and when news is about women, the story only gains real prominence if there is a male authority figure on the scene. In the same vein, Okunna (2012) argues that the images of women portrayed in the Nigerian media are unrealistic and stereotypical while in contrast, men have been shown as constructive, powerful, autonomous and achievement-oriented. Thus, Patrick and Ekpeyong (2015) affirm that the Nigerian media are guilty of misrepresenting the womenfolk.

This misrepresentation informed Ohaja (2015b)’s call for the embrace of gender-sensitive reporting. In the coverage of politics and elections, she identifies the negative stereotypes of women the media should avoid if they are to give fair and equal representation to males and females to include such notions of female politicians as:

- Promiscuous – sleeping with many men to advance
- Beautiful – decorative, fluffy but incompetent
- Poor home makers – neglecting their husbands and children
- Spiteful and vindictive – not as open and forgiving as men who easily form alliances with erstwhile political enemies

Furthermore, in most cases, the approach the media take in covering female politicians portrays them as weaker sexes, emphasising their traditional position as care takers of the family rather than their political abilities and the plans and projects they have to offer if elected into the positions they are vying for. This is why Cili (2015) laments that the focus on female politicians is usually on private and family issues, physical appearance and their roles as wives and mothers. She maintains that women politicians are often asked questions like how they combine their motherly duties and taking care of their homes with their political ambition, whereas the men are not asked such questions.

In general, women are represented by the mass media as subordinates to men and this trend extends to politics. Supporting this view, Omojola (2014, p. 2) states that for centuries, women have been dubbed the “weaker vessels” in most political systems around the world and one of the reasons adduced for the women’s low profile in politics is the unappreciable media coverage that women, especially female politicians, get. The Nigerian mass media have scored

below average in the case of media representation and coverage of females in Nigerian politics, thus relegating women to supporting roles in politics and leadership (Oyewole & Olisa, 2017). This means that the Nigerian mass media do not give female political candidates and their activities the same level of attention they accord their male counterparts and only promote them as supporters and cheerleaders to the men.

Corroborating this view, Ezugwu (2016) notes that evidence in the society has shown that women in both the rural and urban centres participate or involve themselves in politics but their coverage by the press is at minimum. Similarly, Chika (2012) opines that the negative portrayal of Nigerian women as passive, dependent and subservient by the Nigerian mass media reinforces the stereotyping of women in the society. Practices such as selective attention by media gate-keepers tend to manipulate media content in a way that downplays the positive and considerable role of women in the Nigerian society.

Empirical Review

Women's involvement in politics varies all over the world and their participation in politics and the democratic process has become an integral part of contemporary discourse on national development and governance (Ogbogu, 2012). Nigeria has been recording low participation of women in both elective and appointive positions, even after the initiation of democratic government in 1999. The mass media dominate public thinking and form a cogent force of political mobilisation.

Several studies have linked the media with women's political participation in Nigeria, ascribing advocacy and mobilisation power to the media in terms of coverage of the subject and other roles the media have to play in encouraging women's participation in Nigerian politics.

In a research on the role of radio in the mobilisation of women towards political participation done in Ogun State, Nigeria, by Adekoya, Akintayo and Adegoke (2015), it was discovered that radio plays a positive role in mobilising women to participate in politics and with the right contents, it can indeed become a potent medium in fostering vast developments for women in politics in Nigeria. The study also revealed that there is a strong relationship between political programmes and participation of women in politics because a good number of women listen to both the English and the Yoruba political programmes, especially the Yoruba programmes on Ogun State Broadcasting Service (OGBC 90.5FM), which was the radio station under study.

Similarly, Akanu (2015) carried out a research on the portrayal of women in the Nigerian mass media. The study surveyed how the mass media in Nigeria portray women and treat issues affecting them. The study sought to find out if women are misrepresented by the mass media, causes and consequences of negative portrayal of women by the mass media, and ways to eradicate stereotypes of women.

Findings from the study revealed that 256 respondents (representing 91.4%) were of the view that women are misrepresented by the mass media while 24 (8.6%) were not. On the causes of negative portrayal of women by the mass media, a greater number of the respondents indicated that women are seen mostly as wives and mothers and thus, they are negatively

portrayed in the mass media. The other causes attested to by the respondents were that women are seen as sex objects by their male counterparts, hence they are not given their rightful place in the society. This explains why women are given passive roles in organisations they find themselves because of the belief that they are naturally the weaker sex.

The consequences of this negative portrayal of women by the mass media include limitation in societal/career opportunities for women, increase in the likelihood and acceptance of sexual violence in the society and loss of respect for women by the males. The respondents listed some ways by which this negative portrayal of women by the mass media can be eradicated, such as installation of legislative frames, women empowerment schemes and providing role models to women who would encourage them to brace up against societal challenges and reduce how badly they are being portrayed by the mass media.

Moreover, Oyesomi and Oyero (2012) measured the volume of coverage given by Nigerian newspapers to female political candidates as against their male counterparts, the prominence given to the reports on women's participation in the 2011 general elections and the tone used in the reportage. The study found out that Nigerian newspapers, as exemplified by *Punch* and *The Guardian*, did not give adequate coverage to women's participation in the elections compared to their male counterparts. Out of the 464 stories that were content analysed by the researchers, only 62 reports were centered on women's participation. The study also revealed that women's participation accounted for a mere 9.1% in the general elections which comprised presidential, gubernatorial and legislative elections.

The above results corroborate Oyesomi (2007) who conducted a similar study and found out that out of the 192 issues from *Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers that were sampled giving a total of 422 reports or news items on the 2007 general elections, *Punch* reported only 23 items on women as against 200 for men while *The Guardian* reported a total of 33 reports on women as against 166 reports on men. This implies that for the study period of 8 months (November 2006 – June 2007), these newspapers reported only 56 issues on women out of 422 issues on the 2007 general elections. Thus, coverage of women's participation in politics in the 2007 general elections was relatively poor.

Such trend of misrepresentation of women and low coverage of female political candidates continued even in the subsequent elections in Nigeria. For instance, Ezugwu (2016) also bemoaned the low coverage given to women's participation in politics by the Nigerian print media. The study noted that a total of 450 items published within 20 weeks of study by the two newspapers were analysed using straight news, editorials, opinion articles, letters to the editor and photographs as units of analysis. The researcher found out that within the 20 weeks under review, *Daily Sun* published 240 stories on men and 15 on women while *Vanguard* published 168 stories on men and 27 on women, bringing the figures to a sum total of 408 stories on men and 42 on women during the 2015 elections. The researcher concluded that the women and their participation in the 2015 election were reported in poor light by the media. However, in some stories illustrated with photographs, women were covered well and reported in a favorable way.

Several authors have conducted studies on why women are poorly represented in the media and why they do not enjoy the same political support and acceptance like their male

counterparts. Iloka (2021) found that patriarchy and gender roles are major setbacks for women's participation in Nigerian politics. According to the study, the family is the main institution of patriarchy, which is an important concept in explaining gender inequality. Men have been given a higher social status over females and this reflects in state activities. The family plays an important role in maintaining this patriarchal order across generations. This goes to affirm that the mass media more often than not, mirror and project the existing discrimination against the female folk even as it affects their political involvement.

This is so rooted in our system judging by the media ownership structure in Nigeria. It is often said that he who pays the piper dictates the tune. Most Nigerian mass media channels of information dissemination are owned by powerful male politicians. Media ownership has continued to play an influential role in the editorial policies of media organisations. Also, the top management of these media organisations are dominated by men. Across the media landscape, female media workers are usually under male editors and sub-editors who determine what should and should not be published or aired.

In Africa, countries like Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda, Mozambique, South Africa and Namibia have all recorded an increase in the number of women in their parliaments in recent years (Townley 2019). While explaining data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Oladapo, Atela and Agbalajobi (2021) point out that current figures for women's representation in these countries as of 2020 are: Rwanda (61.3 per cent lower house, 38.46 per cent upper house), South Africa (46.58 per cent upper house, 37.74 per cent lower house), Namibia (43.27 per cent lower house, 19.05 per cent upper house), Mozambique (41.2 per cent), Ethiopia (38.8 per cent lower house, 32 per cent upper house), and Uganda (34.9 per cent). However, Nigeria's case is the reverse of the regional trend in women's participation in political leadership. In fact, women are hardly visible in the country's political narrative. A woman has never been elected president, vice president nor governor since Nigeria's independence. The highest number of female deputy governors ever attained was six out of the possible 36 elected in 2007. Since then, the number has consistently decreased (Oladapo, Atela & Agbalajobi, 2021).

The influence of the mass media in mobilising women for political participation is enormous at varying levels. The mass media are capable of stimulating women's engagement in political activities such as registration as members in political parties, registration as voters, vying for electoral positions, campaigning for elections and electorates' management. This is because the press is more important than the three arms of government in exerting ramifying influence and great power on the daily lives of millions of people (Sanyaolu & Oni, 2017). Also, Narayana and Ahamad (2016) opine that the mass media are considered to be the most important tool of society in modern times as it has the power to reach out to a large audience. The mass media, especially the electronic and digital media, encourage the personalisation of politics by bringing the voice and faces of politicians to the homes of citizens in a consistent manner.

Theoretical Framework:

This research work is anchored on the agenda setting theory. Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw developed the Agenda Setting theory in 1968 through an empirical study (The Chapel Hill study) of the 1968 United States' presidential election. This theory seeks to explain why

people with similar media exposure place importance on the same issues got from the media at a particular time.

The Agenda Setting theory puts forth the ability of the media to influence the significance of events in the public’s mind. As Benard Cohen (1963, p. 54) states, “the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about”. The media set agenda for the audience’s discussion and mentally order and organise their world. This theory is relevant to this research work in the sense that the mass media can anchor on the strength of the media to create special content on the issue of women’s participation in politics in Nigeria and highlight such issues as important. Consistent attention given to this topic together with persistent calls to action and active campaigns to Nigerians for support could enhance women’s participation in politics.

Method

The survey method was adopted as the most suitable design for the subject matter under study due to its ability to investigate issues in realistic settings. This study covers the 6 geo-political zones of Nigeria and therefore, encompasses the population of Nigeria which according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022) currently stands at 215,735,601. Using the sample size calculator as developed by the National Statistical Service of Australia, the sample size of this study was determined to be 384. Nigeria is made up of a federal capital territory and 6 geo-political zones comprising 36 states. Therefore, each zone got an equal number of questionnaire – 64 copies which were distributed among literate adults of 18 years and above. These copies of the questionnaire were distributed and retrieved through email. However, out of 384 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 362 were properly filled and returned.

Findings

Table 2: Capability of the mass media to influence women’s participation in politics

			Capable					Total
			Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutra l	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Gender Male	Count	60	72	5	10	0	147	
	% within Gender	40.8%	49.0%	3.4%	6.8%	0.0%	100.0%	
Female	Count	88	97	19	4	7	215	
	% within Gender	40.9%	45.1%	8.8%	1.9%	3.3%	100.0%	
Total		148	169	24	14	7	362	
		40.9%	46.7%	6.6%	3.9%	1.9%	100.0%	

Table 2 shows data on the capability of the mass media to influence women’s participation in politics. The data reveals that a higher number of the respondents strongly agree (40.9%) and agree (46.7%) that the mass media are capable of influencing and encouraging women’s participation in politics. A small number – 24 (6.6%) of the respondents maintained a neutral stance and a paltry sum of 14 (3.9%) and 7 (1.9%) of the respondents disagreed and strongly

disagreed respectively. This means that a higher number of the respondents are of the opinion that the mass media are capable of influencing women’s participation in politics. Therefore, it can be deduced that the mass media constitute strong influential forces in the society and are capable of setting an agenda or promoting a cause in the society, such as, the need for women to actively participate in the decision-making process of the country.

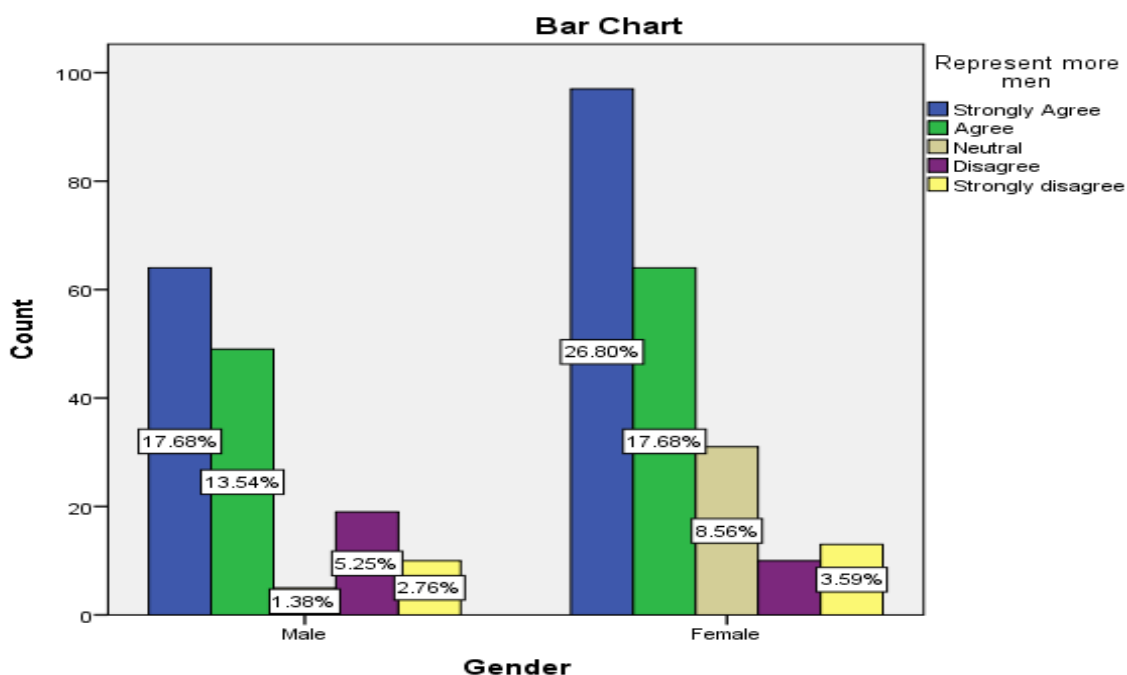
Factors responsible for low women’s participation in politics

Table 3: Negative media representation of women

			Media Representation		Total
			Yes	No	
Gender	Male	Count	126	21	147
		% within Gender	85.7%	14.3%	100.0%
	Female	Count	199	16	215
		% within Gender	92.6%	7.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	325	37	362
		% within Gender	89.8%	10.2%	100.0%

The data presented above shows that a large number of both the male and female respondents (325, 89.8%) are of the view that the mass media represent women differently from the way they represent the men. An insignificant amount of the respondents (37, 10.2%), especially the males (21, 14.3%), however think otherwise. The implication of this is that the mass media misrepresent the womenfolk by projecting a negative view of them as opposed to the way they represent the men.

Figure 1: More media attention to men

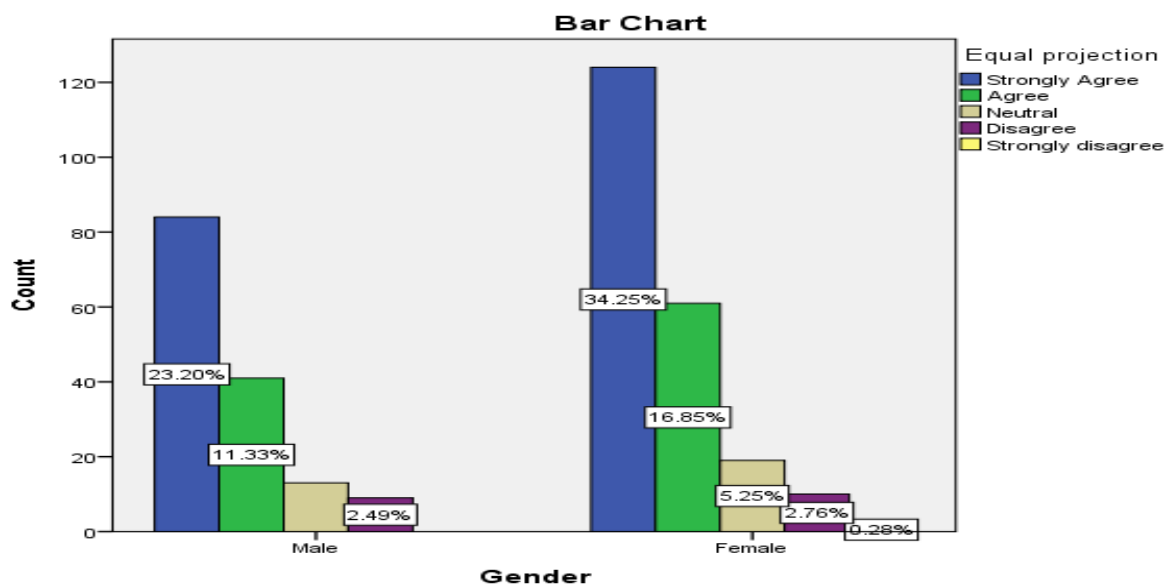


Findings presented in Figure 1 above also show that a good number of the respondents strongly agree (161, 44.5%) and agree (113, 31.2%) that the mass media project male politicians

more than they project female politicians. This means that the mass media give more attention to male politicians by giving more airtime and space, and giving them more coverage than female politicians. When women are not adequately projected by the mass media, their efforts would not be recognised and this can limit the amount of support they get from the public. This in turn presents an obstacle to women’s active participation in politics.

How mass media can mobilise and represent women in the forthcoming 2023 general elections

Figure 2: Equal projection of female politicians



Findings from Figure 2 reveal that a greater bulk of the respondents strongly agree (208, 57.5%) and agree (102, 28.2%) that an equal projection of female politicians by the mass media, the same way the male politicians are projected, constitutes one of the ways the mass media can mobilise women to actively participate in politics. Some of the respondents remained neutral (32, 8.8%) while a small number disagreed (19, 5.2%) and strongly disagreed (1, 0.3%).

Discussion of Findings

There is a consensus among media researchers that the mass media have important roles to play in the society including entrenching and strengthening democracy. This also includes how they picture, portray and present female political candidates. The findings of this study affirm that higher number of respondents strongly agree (40.9%) and agree (46.7%) that the mass media are capable of influencing and encouraging women’s participation in politics. In reality and contrary to their lofty responsibility, this study corroborates the findings of previous studies (Okunna, 2012; Omojola, 2014; Patrick & Ekpenyong, 2015) that the mass media represent women differently from the way they represent the men which by implication suggests that the mass media misrepresent the womenfolk by projecting a negative view of them as opposed to the way they represent the men. This is extensively interlinked with the media ownership that is dominated by powerful male politicians who

dictate what is said and when it is said, as well as media staffing whereby editors and top media practitioners are mostly men.

However, this study identified how the mass media can mobilise and present women in the forthcoming 2023 general elections. Among other things, this study found education as a very important tool through which women can be properly mobilised and represented. Respondents indicated that educating women on the importance of actively participating in politics is one of the key means through which the mass media can mobilise women to participate in politics. Education is one of the core functions of the mass media. The mass media should, therefore, discuss and emphasise more on the need for women to participate in politics and always project the need for people to change their wrong attitudes concerning women's involvement in politics. These findings also align with the postulations of the Agenda Setting theory which states that the mass media set agenda by placing emphasis on a certain issue over others and giving it more attention and coverage and the audience not only learn about public issues through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the media place upon it.

Moreover, this study reveals that a greater number of respondents strongly agree (208, 57.5%) and agree (102, 28.2%) that an equal projection of female politicians by the mass media, the same way the male politicians are projected, constitutes one of the ways the mass media can mobilise women to actively participate in politics. This comes in terms of equal and level playing ground, giving women more airtime to discuss their political ambitions without biased references to their physical appearance or how they would combine household duties with their political responsibilities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is generally acknowledged that women's participation in politics is crucial to the development of any democratic nation and that the mass media are major agenda setters capable of setting things in motion and mobilising women to actively participate in politics. The mass media stimulate citizen engagement in politics and have always influenced the thoughts and behaviour of the public. The media are major agenda setters in positively portraying female politicians to the public. As important agents of mobilisation and advocacy, the mass media should strengthen their mechanisms for checks and balances with respect to gender-based reports. The media should as a matter of social importance, enable projection of women in a decent way that promotes respect and dignity for them by avoiding negative representation of the female folk. They can thus make it clear that women's participation in politics is an essential part of democracy.

Finally, to ensure a wider and a more effective reach to women, especially those in the rural areas, community-based media should engage in indigenous language broadcast and discussion programmes that would serve as vehicles for educating women on the importance of their inclusion and participation in politics.

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