



African Studies



PREMIUM TIMES CENTRE FOR
INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM



Centre for Democracy & Development
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Gendered Contests: Women in Competitive Elections

An Analysis of Women's participation
in the 2019 Nigeria General Elections.



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A joint project by the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies African Studies Program (SAIS-AFP), Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism (PTCIJ), and the Center for Democracy and Development (CDD).

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1. INTRODUCTION

The history of women's engagement in power and government in Nigeria reveal patterns of disadvantage in gaining access to both elective and appointive positions resulting from carefully orchestrated strategies of exclusion. While the historic 2015 alternation of power from a ruling to an opposition party in Nigeria signifies democratic consolidation, the little it did to improve women's political representation casts aspersions on its integrity and legitimacy. The 2019 general elections set a new record for women's involvement in the political process as reflected in the increased number of women aspirants. However, increased political participation did not translate to power gains for women. In fact, the electoral gains made in 2011 have subsequently been eroded over the last two election cycles.

In 2019, as is historically the case in Nigeria, it was women who lost out – they won just 5% of all contested seats. These figures represent yet again a failure to attain the minimum one-third (30%) women's representation stipulated in several regional and global conventions to which Nigeria is a signatory. This is often the case in the absence of intentionally established structures to lower the cost of entrance, incentivize participation by leveling the playing field and provide safeguards against the culture of politics as a life-and-death venture. Instead, women's progress in gaining access to political power was yet again diminished by an ever-expanding host of structural, functional, and personal factors.



In 2019, as is historically the case in Nigeria, it was women who lost out – they **won just 5%** of all contested seats.

In light of this election experience, it was no surprise that only seven women were appointed ministers in August 2019; a mere 17% of appointments made. Furthermore the ministerial portfolios assigned to women reflects women's allegation that men prefer women in appointive positions as part of the power subjection. This way women can be kept out of strategic positions, and men are able to take pleasure in "giving" women things rather than dealing with women's successful political challenge.¹



This was one of the findings of a gendered analysis of the 2019 electoral contests, which represents the sixth consecutive general elections in Nigeria since its return to democracy in 1999. The study highlights the opportunities and challenges posed by the proliferation of new parties in the political scene. It also points to the seeming intractability of patriarchal constraints, gender bias and stereotypes; the enduring disadvantage women suffer from exclusionary practices and structures within political parties; the constraining effect of women's lack of access to resources; the impact of patronage linkages; and the impact of electoral violence on women's political engagement. The study titled "Gendered Contests: Women in Competitive Elections" was conducted through a tripartite partnership between the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) African Studies Program, the Center for Democracy and Development (CDD) Nigeria, and Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism (PTCIJ).

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¹ An insight gained from interviews with members of domestic women-based civil society.

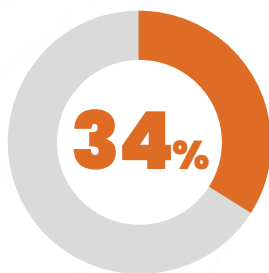
2. DATA & METHODS

The study aims to understand how gender impacts women's effective engagement in competitive elections; how women navigate these terrains; and the positive and negative implications for women's political participation in Nigeria. In this study, we take political participation to mean standing for elective or appointive positions (representation). This study used a mixed-methods approach that included an online public opinion survey, semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, and secondary data. The online survey was administered to 622 persons through the Google platform and disseminated through the social media platforms of the Premium Times, the CDD, and SAIS, as well as other social media influencers' platforms.² The age distribution of the respondents was as follows: 18-25 (34%); 26-39 (47%); 40-69 (19%). The semi-structured in-depth interview sample was purposively drawn and included women politicians – both aspirants and candidates, members of civil society, media persons and academics. The researchers participated in the elections while observing voting at several polling stations in Abuja, Nigeria. The secondary data came from media reports and other research materials.

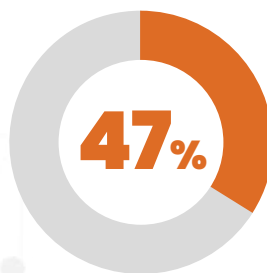


The online survey was administered to **622 persons**.

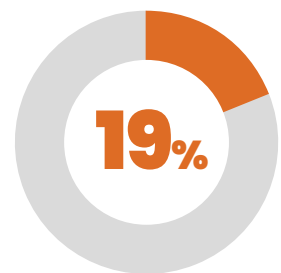
Age 18-25



Age 26-39



Age 40-69



² The gender spread of the survey was as follows: Male – 58% /Female – 42%.

3. PRE-ELECTION CONDITION

Nigeria's nascent democracy has undergone several spurts and stops since the country's 1960 independence from colonial rule. With interruptions owing to multiple coup d'états, Nigeria's checkered democratic history has resulted in a relatively young and under-developed electoral system. The 1999 return to democratic rule set off the Fourth Republic and the establishment of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which has so far conducted six rounds of general elections, the latest conducted in February 2019. The relative under-development of INEC is evidenced by the chronic logistical failures that have temporarily delayed all recent national-level elections.³ INEC's spluttering performance is reflected, not just in its conduct of elections, but also in its broader constitutional mandate to serve as a regulator of political parties in the country. The Nigerian Constitution mandates the electoral body to "monitor the organization and operation of political parties," including their finances and internal democratic processes, as well as "provide rules and regulations which shall govern the political parties."⁴ The various party-level irregularities, such as candidate intimidation during primaries or unregulated party/candidate financing, are a consequence of INEC's regulatory failures.⁵



The 1999 return to democratic rule set off the Fourth Republic and the establishment of the **Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)**.

³ All three elections have been postponed, barely days to the polls as a result of logistical concerns, in 2011 and 2019, and by the executive government in 2015 due to security concerns.

⁴ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as Amended in 2011), Section 15 (1).

⁵ Admittedly, the Electoral Act (2010) provides contradictory mandates for INEC, focusing on party financing while ignoring candidates. This makes finance regulation difficult for INEC. See NDI 2011 report (p. 38)

Nonetheless, the fourth democratic republic is Nigeria's longest democratic stretch; hence, the electoral institutions show a certain level of resilience, stability, and promise. The 2015 alternation of power from the ruling party to an opposition party helped solidify Nigeria's democracy. However, Nigeria's democratic development has not translated to equitable advancement for the entire electorate. Instead, the democratic system has reinforced long-standing cleavages between ordinary citizens and political elites and entrepreneurs. Additionally, while touting inclusion as part of the democratic dividend, the system has perpetuated its long-standing exclusion of minorities and other disadvantaged groups like women from access to power. The high entry cost into the political space and the increasing monetization of politics has restricted access to political participation for individuals other than ethno-regional and political elites.



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4. KEY FINDINGS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

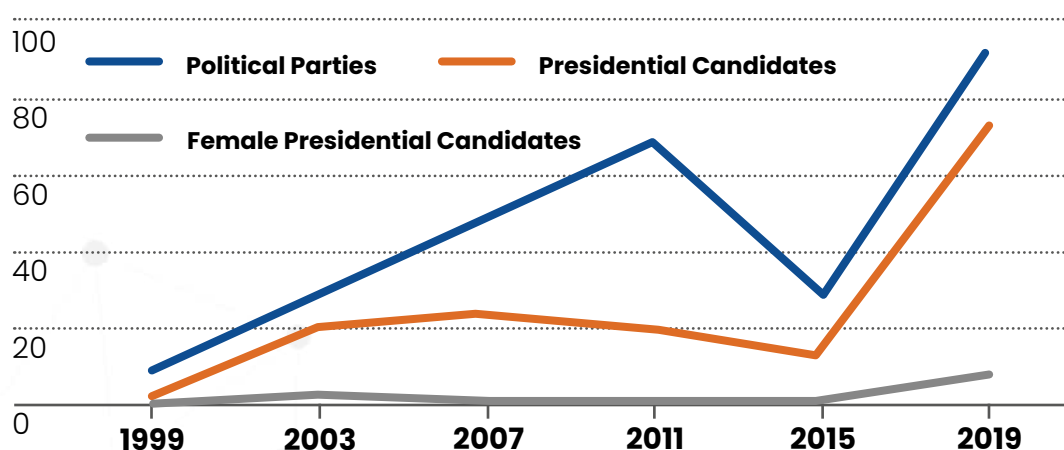
4.1. Opportunities for Women's Political Participation

4.1.1. Party Proliferation

While the debate on the utility of multipartism for democratic consolidation continues, this study found that the multiplicity of political parties advanced, to a degree, women's political participation. More than preceding cycles, the 2019 electoral cycle opened up the political space, which served to boost political engagement for marginalized groups. This was especially the case for women and youth. A younger and more diverse crop of candidates took advantage of the platform provided by the proliferation of new and smaller political parties to run for various positions at the state and national levels.⁷

Figure 1.
Parties and
Candidates:
1999–2019⁸

Data Source: INEC



⁶ Multipartism here refers to the existence of many political parties in contrast to two dominant political parties, rather than the single party/no party system that evolved in the second decade of independence in African politics.

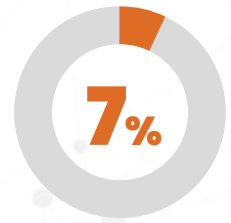
⁷ We define new and small parties simply. We refer to new parties as parties that emerged post-2011. This excludes parties like the APC, formed when long-standing bigger parties merged in 2015. We take small parties to mean all parties other than the three biggest parties: PDP, APC, and APGA.

⁸ A decision in 2014 to deregister certain political parties that failed to meet certain requirements led to the dip in political parties, and candidates, in 2015.

The number of political parties has increased from 9 in 1999 to 91 in 2019. However, it is important to note that the number of registered parties does not mean they all field candidates in all/any level of the elections. For instance, in the 2011 electoral cycle, 56 out of 63 registered parties fielded candidates in the general elections and only 20 fielded presidential candidates.

For the presidency, candidature rose by 275% from 20 in 2011 to 73 in 2019. State-level contests saw even more dramatic changes. Vying for 991 seats, bids for State Houses of Assembly rose by 450%, with the number of aspirants growing to 14,785 in the 2019 elections, up from 2,690 in 2011. The proliferation of small political parties helped to widen the space in 2019. In turn, this has enabled women's increased participation; all six female presidential candidates in the 2019 elections were from small or new political parties.

This trend is more noticeable in the National Assembly elections. Of the 232 female candidates that stood for senatorial contests across the country in 2019, only 17 were candidates of Nigeria's two main political parties: the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) (7) and the main opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) (10). Across federal elections – presidential, senatorial, and house of representatives, 95.5% of women candidates emerged from new or small parties. But this is neither a new nor surprising phenomenon. Historically, bigger and more established political parties have rarely fielded female candidates in elections.



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For the highest office in Nigeria, no woman has ever emerged as the candidate of the major parties. Nigeria's first female presidential candidate since the 1999 return to democracy, Sarah Jibril, first contested in primary elections in 1998 on the PDP platform, but she was unsuccessful and ultimately defected to a smaller party, Progressive Action Congress (PAC), on whose platform she ran for president in 2003. She was joined in 2003 by Mojisola Adekunle-Obasanjo, who contested as the candidate of the Mass Movement of Nigeria (MMN) in 2003, and again in 2007. This trend that has continued ever since: all women who have run for president since 1999 have run on the platform of small parties.

Table 1.

**Big vs. Small Parties:
Percentage of
Women Candidates
in 2019 Federal
Elections**

Data Source: INEC

Elections	Ruling Party Candidates (APC)	Leading Opposition Party Candidates (PDP)	New/Small Party Candidates (Others)
President	0	0	100
Senate	3.04	4.31	92.65
House of Reps.	2.65	3.60	93.75

However this proliferation of political parties in the 2019 elections must be analyzed within the context of the broader debate about the relevance and value of smaller political parties, especially ones whose candidates do not win electoral offices. In 2014 INEC deregistered over 50 political parties, leading to a substantive drop in the number of parties that presented candidates for the 2015 election. Although the constitution empowers INEC to deregister parties that breach requirements¹², lawsuits by the aggrieved political parties and the legal processes that followed the 2014 mass deregistration led to the reinstatement of these parties for the 2019 ballot.

⁹ INEC (2011). Report on the 2011 General Elections, p. 14. Available at: <https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/REPORT-ON-THE-2011-GENERAL-ELECTIONS.pdf>. Accessed: 07/17/2019.

¹⁰ All women presidential candidates dropped off the race before the date of the actual voting but were, however, represented in the ballots and received votes across the country.

¹¹ Mass Action Joint Alliance (MAJA), National Interest Party (NIP), Alliance for a United Nigeria (AUN), National Action Council (NAC), Nigerian People's Congress (NPC) and finally, Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN).

¹² According to Section 225 of the Constitution, INEC can deregister political parties that fail to win 25% of votes in at least one state in the federal elections or fail to win at least one seat in local government elections.

Arguments against the representation of these parties in the ballot include: their potential ability to spread votes across non-competitive parties and candidates; the unnecessary waste of INEC resources (for instance, they increase the volume of voting materials and strain INEC's monitoring resources); and the confusion created for the electorate owing to scores of candidates on the voting materials.¹³ Additionally, many in the political space cast aspersions on the intentionality surrounding the creation and registration of some of these parties, arguing they are simply tools for bargaining and subterfuge. Clearly, many smaller parties had neither the resources nor structure to competitively contest political power even at the municipal level, providing substance to one of the major criticisms of party proliferation: that it fragments and weakens opposition.

In 2019, as the campaign season unfolded and political parties rolled out their campaign programs, the narrative of smaller and newer parties as a bargaining tool for its leaders to gain visibility in the hope of negotiating self-interested deals with the bigger parties or government became louder. In the same vein, a different but similar narrative of smaller political parties as a ploy deployed by the bigger parties to dominate and stifle space for opposition crystallized. In the aftermath of the withdrawal of the most high-profile female presidential aspirant – Oby Ezekwesili, her party's immediate endorsement of the ruling APC party, led to speculation that the party bosses were covertly linked to the APC machinery.

Nonetheless, evidence suggests it is mostly through these smaller parties that most women enter political processes and gain relevant experience in electioneering and politicking. Women interviewed for this study noted that smaller parties expanded opportunities because of their grassroots structure. According to one of the new women politicians interviewed:

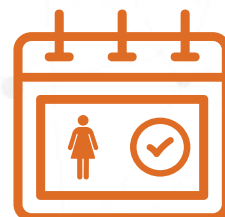


In 2019 the narrative of **smaller and newer parties** as a bargaining tool for its leaders to gain visibility in the hope of negotiating self-interested deals with the bigger parties or government became louder.

¹³ See arguments urging for the pruning of political parties in these newspaper reports: Ojo, Jide (2019). Should INEC deregister non-performing political parties? The Punch, April 3. Available at: <https://punchng.com/should-inec-deregister-non-performing-political-parties/>; The Cable (2019). INEC may deregister over 80 parties. The Cable, March 18. Available at: <https://www.thecable.ng/inec-may-deregister-over-80-parties>.

“The smaller and newer parties give us a chance to win because it is grassroots, the people know these women who are contesting... they know us, they know our passion for helping our people and they know our capacities for working for the people in contrast to all those men who engage in politics to make more money and fame.”

Contesting on the platform of smaller parties allows women politicians to build a base and political following as well as develop a dense network of allies in the political arena. Nevertheless, the derived utility of women's political participation through small and new parties is questionable, when most of them fail to win when votes are cast or withdraw from the process before it begins.



In part this is related to the tendency for smaller parties to become tools in the hands of the leading opposition or the ruling party. In the 2019 elections, all but one of the six women presidential candidates pulled out from the race less than 45 days to the elections.¹⁴ Even before they had pulled out of the race, questions were raised about several of the candidates' unrealistic manifestos. This led critics to frame their engagement as a caricature, with some women arguing they had trivialized the issue of women's marginalization¹⁵. Pulling out at such a late stage meant that their names remained on the ballot even though they had withdrawn from the race. Most small parties and their candidates did not just pull out from the elections; they pledged support for one or the other of the ruling or opposition party candidates¹⁶. Consequently these parties, and their women candidates, were perceived as instruments serving to prop up existing exclusionary state or party institutions and further perpetuating the unequal playing field.

In the 2019 elections, **all but one** of the six women presidential candidates **pulled out from the race less than 45 days** to the elections.

¹⁴ Angela Johnson of the Alliance for a United Nigeria (AUN) party remained in the race.

¹⁵ For example, the entire sample of interviewees expressed exasperation with Eunice Atuejide's presidential candidature, questioning her motivations and faulting her public conduct throughout the process.

¹⁶ Rabia Yasai Hassan Cengiz (NCP) and Maina Maimuna Kyari (NPC) both pulled out of the race in February and endorsed the candidate of the ruling party. Oby Ezekwesili pulled out of the race in January but refrained from endorsing either of the two main candidates, even as her party endorsed the ruling party. See: Terzungwe, Saawua (2019) NAC adopts Buhari as consensus candidate. Available at: <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/nac-adopts-buhari-as-consensus-candidate.html>; Fowowe, Solomon (2019) ACPN denounces Ezekwesili, pledges support for Buhari. Available at: <https://guardian.ng/news/acpn-denounces-ezekwesili-support-for-buhari/>

4.1.2. Social Media Advocacy and Diversity Norm Diffusion

Traditional media's capacity to shape the political landscape and play a significant role in determining winners and losers of elections through their agenda-setting and gate-keeping roles is being challenged by the rapid advancement in Information Communication Technology (ICT) and the subsequent pervasiveness of social media platforms. Historically, media coverage of elections and candidates have been gendered in ways that disadvantage and derail women candidates' campaigns through unequal and unbalanced exposure. This is a result of media owners, managers, and professionals ideological and partisan persuasions, stereotypical ideas about women, as well as women's financial disadvantage in purchasing airtime. This was so damaging as to be addressed in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, which recommended 'encouraging gender-sensitive training for media professionals, including media owners and managers, to promote the creation and use of non-stereotyped, balanced and diverse images of women in the media'.



The advent, and effective use, of **mass media** has provided women with the tools to **reach** their constituencies and **target audiences** in a more **cost-effective way**.



The advent, and effective use, of mass media – Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp – has provided women with the tools to reach their constituencies and target audiences in a more cost-effective way; to facilitate increased interaction with prospective voters; and in providing them with a platform to control and better shape their narratives. A recent survey has found that about 91 percent of Nigerians use WhatsApp.¹⁷ This outcome is also corroborated by the SAIS/PTCIJ data, where 99 percent of the survey respondents acceded that they used a cell phone and WhatsApp daily. Oby Ezekwesili and Natasha Akopti, who contested the presidential and Kogi Central Senatorial District races respectively are two good examples. Ezekwesili announced her run for presidency to her 900,000 on Twitter and amassed a huge following and campaign funds from the social media platform.

Figure 2.
Twitter Frame of
Oby Ezekwesili's
Presidential
Candidacy
Announcement



¹⁷ This is based on a limited study in two of 37 states and the FCT. Nevertheless, it points to the popularity of this easily accessible/relatively cheaper social media platform. For more see: Hitchen, J. et al. (2019) Whatsapp and Nigeria's 2019 Elections: Mobilising the People, Protecting the Vote. Available at: <https://www.cddwestafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/WHATSAPP-NIGERIA-ELECTION-2019.pdf>.

Women's increased participation in the recently concluded elections also owes its relative and limited success to the concept of diversity, which has evolved into a global norm within the past decade and is increasingly gaining traction not just in business but in politics as well. Combined with the innovative use of social media to propagate these norms, many women political actors have gained prominence and enhanced the discourse of gender mainstreaming in Nigerian politics. Women have used social media influencing on platforms like Twitter and WhatsApp to highlight the constraints that women face in general as members of the society, and in politics in particular.

Through social media advocacy, individual actors and groups have formed support structures for women politicians, working to offset the constraining effects of traditional women's groups within Nigeria's political institutions, which have typically served to prop up the parties' patriarchal structures. These also highlight the disadvantageous class dynamics in Nigerian politics, with many functioning as gatekeepers to keep certain women out of electoral politics. New support groups, especially for younger and new women politicians, function differently. For instance, a WhatsApp group, SheWins, was formed with a membership of over 40 women candidates representing different political parties across the country. Created by women advocates, the WhatsApp group brought together female candidates, particularly first-time contenders, providing training support and mentorship through the 2019 campaign process.¹⁸ These support groups and forums also provided women politicians a platform to share experiences, gain and offer emotional support and expand their network of allies.

The emergence of these types of support groups is a new phenomenon in Nigerian politics. But with no extensive party infrastructure within the new and small parties to lend candidates support, compared to what is (allegedly) offered by the more established parties, women candidates were compelled to band together. In doing so, social media platforms provided the mechanism through which women operating in different geopolitical spaces across the country could find common ground and form virtual and semi-virtual communities.



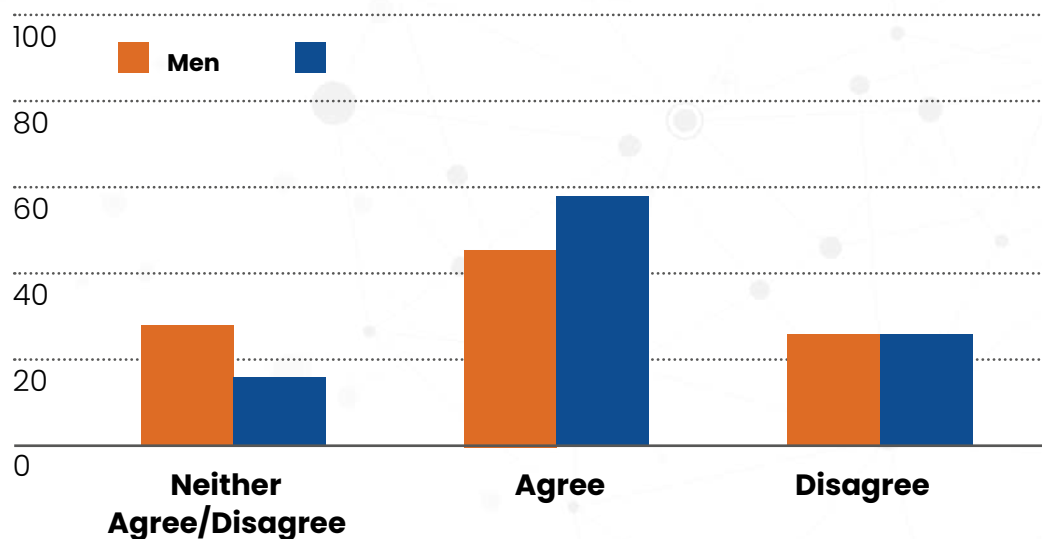
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¹⁸ Based on an interview with group founder Chioma Agwuegbo. Abuja, February 21, 2019

4.1.3. Legal Framework

Figure 3.
Respondents
Requiring
Parties to
Increase Women
Candidates by
30%

Source: SAIS/PTCIJ
Survey, 2019



In addition to national legal frameworks that seek to establish gender equality or rectify women's political marginalization – such as the 1999 Constitution and the National Gender Policy of 2006 – Nigeria is a signatory to a string of regional, international and global conventions and protocols that chart a course for gender equality.¹⁹ Nevertheless, until these conventions are domesticated, implemented, and enforced, they remain strategies of building international legitimacy.

The concept of equality is enshrined in the Nigerian constitution, which establishes that political participation, through the party system, “is open to every citizen of Nigeria irrespective of his place of origin, circumstance of birth, sex, religion or ethnic grouping”²⁰ However, the absence of non-restrictive laws has not resulted in women's broad political engagement beyond participation as the electorate. The country's two main electoral reform processes – the 1986 military era political bureau and the 2008 Electoral Reform Committee led by Justice Uwais, – both addressed this poor record.

¹⁹ This includes international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as well as regional instruments such as African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, and Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (“Maputo Protocol”)

²⁰ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as Amended in 2011), Section 222 (b)

These committees made recommendations for policy changes to encourage women's participation. Specifically, the Justice Uwais report went beyond calling for women's access to leadership positions within political parties. It made a constitutional recommendation for a gender quota: "the Electoral Act 2006 should be amended to ensure that 30% of party lists under the proposed Proportional Representation system are reserved for women."²¹ Its 1986 equivalent recommended a 5% quota for women. Both recommendations were not taken on by the respective governments and remain unimplemented.

While debates surround the importance of affirmative action policies for women beyond numerical gains, evidence shows they fast-track women's access to formal political institutions. The absence of a legislated affirmative action policy in Nigeria partly explains women's abysmal political representation across the board. While women benefited from the individual mandate implemented by Goodluck Jonathan, particularly the affirmative action policy that ensured a 30 percent women representation in the executive council, those gains were subsequently rolled-back by the Buhari administration because they lacked legal protection. Even those policies that do exist have struggled to be realized in practice. Nigeria's National Gender Policy (2006), aimed to "achieve minimum threshold of representation for women in order to promote equal opportunity in all areas of political, social, economic life of the country for women, as well as for men"²²



The **absence of a legislated affirmative action policy** in Nigeria partly explains women's abysmal political representation across the board.

²¹ TReport of the Electoral Reform Committee (2008), p. 53.

²² National Gender Policy (2006)

But the framework for the implementation of this policy has not provided a systematic process for ensuring gender mainstreaming in Nigerian institutions. In 2011, INEC established a Gender Policy, based on the guiding principles of the National Gender Policy. Through this policy document, INEC endorsed a “framework for implementation of at least 35% affirmative action on women’s political advancement and representation in democratic governance in Nigeria.”²³ This agenda aimed to apply existing provisions of the national policy to the electoral system with a particular focus on supporting gender balance at the party level and supporting legislative processes to help bridge gender “gaps in political representation in elective posts at all electoral levels.”

Whereas INEC has made some progress in gender mainstreaming within the commission itself – it achieved 30% gender representation of women in the appointments of National Commissioners – it has made no measurable progress in improving gender balances with political parties or bridging gender gaps in political representation. Gender parity within political party leadership remains at an abysmal state and, as this study has amply shown, women’s political representation at all electoral levels is at the lowest since 2003.

In fact, since the 2011 establishment of INEC’s Gender Policy, women’s political representation has been on a steady decline, with 2019 recording a 45% decline from the 2011 performance. While Nigeria has existing legal provisions to support gender mainstreaming in politics, there has yet to be any tangible implementation of these provisions. However our survey shows that popular support for greater gender equality in politics does exist. 51% of respondents thinks political parties should increase women’s participation by 30%.



Gender parity within political party leadership remains at an abysmal state and, as this study has amply shown, women’s political representation at all electoral levels is at the lowest since 2003.

²³ INEC Gender Policy (2011)

4.2. Challenges for Women's Political Participation

Women's participation rose exponentially in the 2019 elections across national and state contests. Yet, this did not translate to women getting elected into office. On the contrary, women experienced a drop in the attainment of electoral offices compared to previous elections.

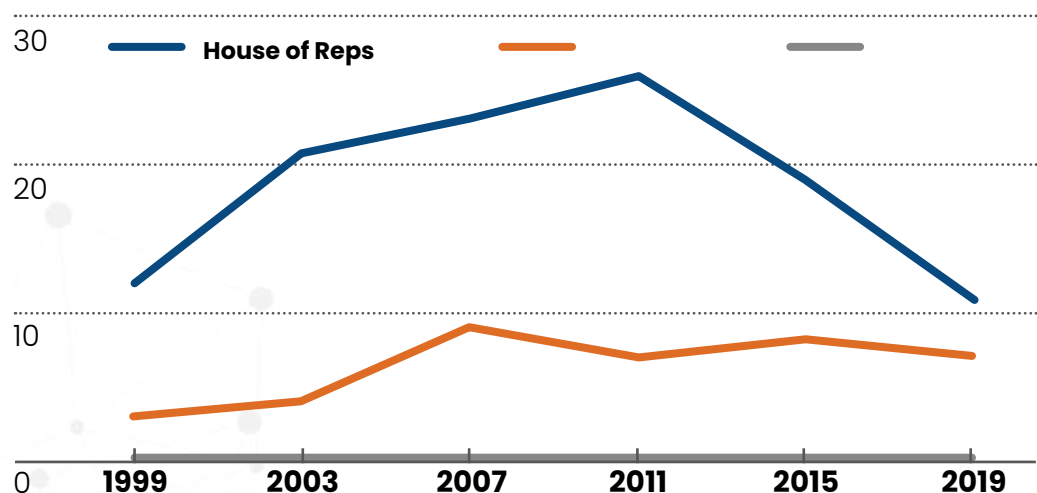
Table 2.
2019 Elections Contestations and Outcomes for Women Candidates

Source: CDD (2019)/ INEC

	Total Positions Available	Total Number of Candidates	Women Candidates	Women Elected Officials
President	1	73	6	0
National Assembly- Senate	109	1,904	235	7
National Assembly- House	360	4,68	533	12
Governor	26	2,412	74	0
State Houses of Assembly	990	14,583	1825	37

Figure 4.
Women Elected into Federal Offices: 1999 – 2019

Data Source: Oshewolo & Adedire (2019)/INEC



Total number of seat:

1 PRESIDENT

109 SENATE

360 HOUSE OF REPS

4.2.1. Party Dynamics as a Challenge to Women's Participation

Interviewees conveyed a shift in perception of political parties as an arena of articulation of ideas and aggregation of interests to a tool of upward mobility, specifically, of power acquisition. As the primary custodians of the electoral process given the absence of independent candidacy, political parties are the 'gate-keepers' of women's political participation. The 1999 Constitution requires that any candidate contesting electoral positions be "a member of a Political Party and be sponsored by that party to be eligible to contest election"²⁴ Past efforts to make independent candidacy lawful all failed, including the latest attempt during the 2016 Constitutional Amendment that established the Not Too Young to Run Bill. Consequent to the legal and institutional provisions designating parties the official arena for political participation, parties serve to aid or deter women's involvement through several structural and procedural mechanisms. Parties decide which woman, and when such a woman will obtain meaningful access to the electoral contest of power. We identify three main party dynamics that continue to deter women's political participation.

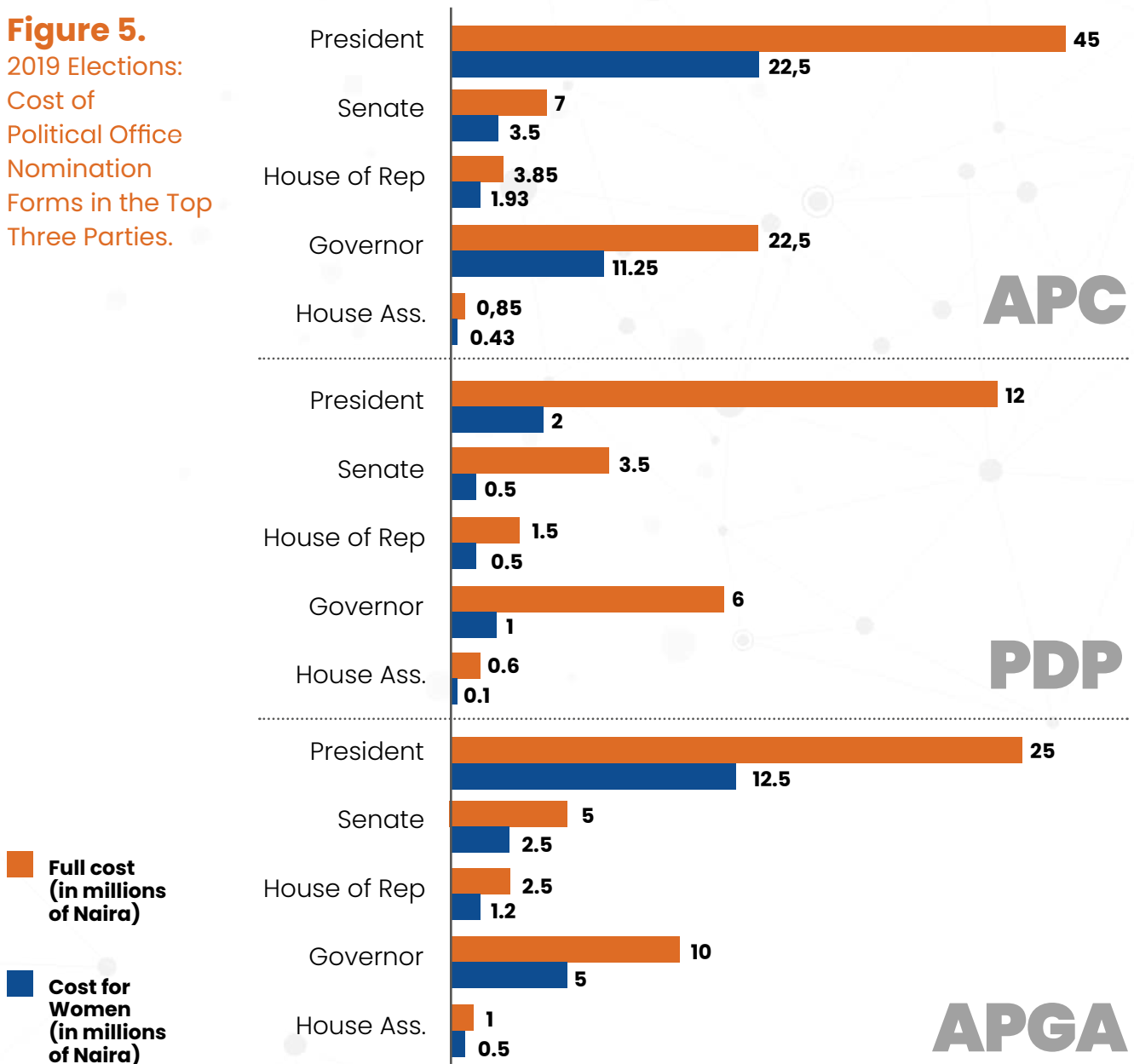


The **cost** of the nomination form is often the **first barrier** women hopefuls face.

- **Candidates Nomination Process and Fees**

The nomination into candidacy begins with the indication of interest through self-nomination. By buying and submitting two forms – an expression of interest and a party nomination form – interested party members present themselves for the primary elections. The cost of the nomination form is often the first barrier women hopefuls face. For instance, the APC and PDP set the cost of the presidential nomination and expression of interest forms at N45 million (\$125,000) and N12 million (\$33,000) respectively. However in the 2019 electoral cycle, both parties gave a discount to women hopefuls. The APC offered a 50% overall reduction for female candidates while the PDP gave a more generous discount, reducing its nomination forms by 100% for female aspirants thus leaving them with the much lower expression of interest cost.²⁵

Figure 5.
2019 Elections:
Cost of
Political Office
Nomination
Forms in the Top
Three Parties.



Despite the reduction in rates for women candidates, many preferred to take their chances in smaller parties, as most offered women candidates entrance free of charge and offered a much higher possibility of attaining candidacy. On average women have a 3% chance of becoming nominated candidates on the platform of big or established parties; whereas in 2019 women candidacy in small/new parties stood at about 96% for federal elections.²⁶

²⁶ See Table 1.

But the cost of political participation primarily extends beyond economic resources. Women candidates find that they are disadvantaged on many fronts, including when it comes to political capital. The majority of successful women politicians have long-standing political careers or are particularly advantaged financially. In the current Nigerian senate, for example, all seven women members – two represent APC and five the PDP, bring with them considerable political clout. All the women have had multiple terms in the lower national assembly or the executive at the state or federal level. While this is true of many other male candidates, the entry bar favors men, granting more inexperienced men access into the political space.

- **Candidates Selection and Internal Party Democracy**

The primary elections expose underhand practices in the candidacy process. Highlighting the democratic deficit within, in particular larger, political parties. The lack of transparency in intra-party candidate selection douses women's political aspirations, and indeed, severely reduces their chances of winning. Across all the interviews conducted with both female and male respondents, there was agreement that the formal and informal rules and procedures of intra-party selection constrain women's involvement. According to Bukky Asobiaro, a leading feminist voice in Nigeria, and Ebele Ifendu, treasurer of the Labor Party and leader of the Women in Nigeria organization:



The primary elections expose **underhand practices** in the candidacy process.

“Party bosses appoint the winners of the various elective posts during meetings in expensive hotel rooms in the dead of night and women are not invited...because, of course, they determine who the delegates are, pay them off for their votes and therefore crown the winner even before the contest... it does not matter how much a woman candidate is liked and preferred by the constituency, if she is not penciled to win by the party chieftains, the chances of her winning are very slim”²⁷

²⁷ Interview with Bukky Asobiaro, a leading feminist voice and gender activist, and Ebele Ifendu, Treasurer of the Labor Party and Leader of Women In Nigeria Group in Abuja, 2018.

During the 2019 electoral cycle, many women candidates found that even when they were able to surmount the high entry requirements, they could not be assured of a fair election process in the primaries. In her Memoir, *Love Does Not Win Election*, Ayisha Osori lucidly documents the twists and turns of intra-party candidate nomination (selection), and the many hoops she jumped through in contesting the House of Representatives primaries, only to realize that party patrons had already selected a winner and the race was a mere legitimization of his 'victory'. The age-long practice of candidate selection by so-called "godfathers" eliminates all pretenses to fairness.

In Ogun state, 28 year old Aderinsola Abiola found that although she had worked to build the APC from its nascent years, she could not be assured of a fair primaries process in her bid to contest to represent Abeokuta North/Obafemi-Owode/Odeda in the National Assembly, given indications of her state party leadership's preference for a male candidate, Olumide Osoba. In the end, Ms. Abiola defected to Action Democratic Party, a smaller party on whose platform she ran for office. Devaan Hanmation-Mom, a woman who contested and won the majority of votes during the APC party primaries for House of Representatives in Benue state, said she was asked to step down by the party since the senatorial candidate in her district was also female.²⁸ Every woman candidate that lost election had a similar (and credible) story of how lack of internal party democracy impeded her chances of advancing beyond the primaries.



During the 2019 electoral cycle, **many women candidates** found that even when they were able to surmount the high entry requirements, they **could not be assured of a fair election process** in the primaries.

²⁸ Nigeria Everyday (2018). Anger in Benue as female aspirant is 'short-changed.' October 9. Available at: <https://everyday.ng/2018/10/09/anger-in-benue-as-female-aspirant-is-short-changed/>. Accessed: July 25, 2019.

Our interviews illustrated how the understanding of godfathers in Nigerian politics has evolved from traditional leaders and super-wealthy elites, to being wholly embodied in the person/office of the state governor. He is, by default, the party leader at the state level just as the president leads the party at the national level. According to several interviewees, state governors have become the main gatekeepers of access to political power at both the state and the federal level to the extent that they determine who is granted or denied party membership. Kole Shettima, the Director of the McArthur Foundation's Africa Office articulated a widely held view:

“Governors have become the chief determinants of who gets access. Many Governors are working hard to police party membership registration... they have the power to and have been known to wield that power in denying certain people registration as members because they do not want political contestation within the party... most Governors and other elites are not interested in inclusive membership ...and so women will find it extremely difficult to enter enmass to be able to redefine the notion of political parties as a place to aggregate their interests... so we see women in large numbers in the performance of civic duties but they are excluded in party power politics, curtailing their chances of gaining power.”

The various women-focused training and sensitization efforts of both domestic and international organizations in the lead up to the elections was significantly truncated by the actions of state governors, who deterred and derailed women's aspirations and candidacy across the country. The then Governor of Imo State, Rochas Okorocha prevented Mrs. Christina Udeh from contesting for the APC ticket. He made it clear that she would be wasting the funds for the nomination fees and "promised" to reward her submission with an appointive position. Mrs. Udeh chose instead to contest under another party, the Social Democratic Party (SDP). In Zamfara State women alleged a complete ban was informally instituted which prevented them from purchasing nomination forms for the state governors party.

A direct ballot system of voting in the party primaries was seen as a more attractive option for many women, given the more problematic indirect system that has prevailed since 1999. Governor Nasir el-Rufai of Kaduna State noted that democratic deficit within political parties "constitutes one of the stiffest barriers to women's access to political power in the country" and notes that "the option A4 (direct ballot system) remains the most viable and immediate solution":²⁹ Many women, however, found that the APC limited the direct ballot system to the presidential primaries. The direct ballot system allows party members to vote for their preferred candidates, whereas the indirect system only allows selected party delegates to nominate the candidates during the primaries elections. The former system allows the groundwork by individual electoral hopefuls in their various communities to pay off. The latter method is fraught with difficulties, and candidates are often compelled to bribe the delegates or out-pay other candidates, making the nomination process even more expensive for women.

- **Diversity/Affirmative Action Norms**

Historically, affirmative action for women has been a deeply contentious issue in Nigerian politics, even though it remains a formally established institution otherwise known as the principle of 'Federal Character' in government. Federal Character determines the distribution and allocation of national resources, including employment, university admission and the armed forces, as some examples. Political parties have, for the most part, consistently rejected the idea of affirmative action for women since the return to democracy in 1999. They have instead adopted various ad hoc methods to include some women, while resisting all calls to legislate affirmative action both within parties and at the national level.

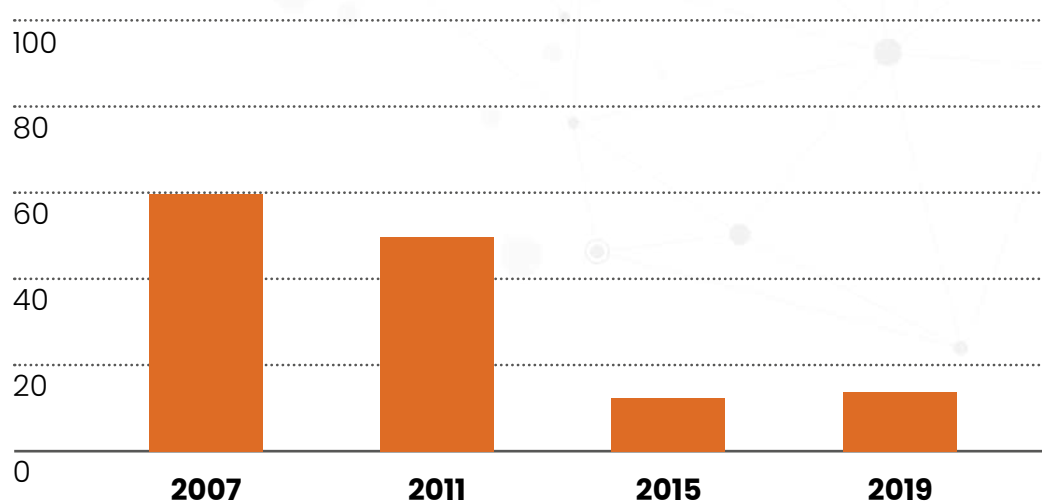


Federal Character determines the distribution and allocation of national resources, including employment, university admission and the armed forces, as some examples.

²⁹ Interview with Governor Nasiru el-Rufai of Kaduna State conducted in his office at the Kaduna State Government House in 2018.

Ahead of the 2007 elections, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), one of the feeder parties of the APC, created a system to ensure female representation in the state executive party ticket. For example, in foremost ACN (now APC) stronghold, Lagos State, all but one of its five deputy governors since 1999 have been women. Although this trend has been criticized as a form of tokenism – especially as the position of a deputy governor is largely ceremonial and carries no substantive political power – it made for good symbolism and provided a significant position for women in the executive council.

Figure 6.
Percentage of Women Deputy Governors in APC Controlled States



However, in the 2015 and 2019 cycle, the APC's party-based affirmative action policy has failed to build on some of the practices on its coalition members. Only two of the 19 APC states have a female deputy governor, and Lagos state now has a male deputy governor. In general, an observable dilution of gender-specific affirmative action policy emerges in the period following the 2013 multi-party merger, which brought together the ACN, northern-based Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), and a faction of All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA). This trend likely results from the conservative ideological bent of the CPC, which is the most powerful component of the APC merger since it controls the presidency.

The PDP, on the other hand, has a constitution that specifies under Article 6.7, “in nomination for party offices at least 15% shall be allocated to women”. But the PDP has not implemented this constitutional provision, prompting its women elites to contemplate legal action against the party in the past. However so far party bosses have been able to persuade them not to pursue legal challenges.³⁰ However, former president Goodluck Jonathan courted the women’s vote in 2011 by promising to, and implementing, a 30 percent female quota in his cabinet. More significantly, his administration’s women ministers occupied high profile, strategic positions – aviation, finance and petroleum – underscoring the fact that these women were not mere ‘tokens’ to enhance the perception of gender parity in his administration.

In the view of ordinary Nigerians there is a near-even split in public opinion on the issue that is perhaps unsurprisingly divided along gender lines (see Figure 5). Whilst the majority of women are in favour of mandating political parties to increase women candidates by 50 percent, over half of male respondents either disagreed or were undecided. However, responses to other questions that seek opinions on some form of increase for women’s participation that do not suggest equality elicited a more positive response across gender, education, location and religious cleavages. For instance 23 percent more men found a 30 percent gender quota more acceptable than a requirement for equal female-to-male distribution in party candidacy. While these responses do not match up with women’s performances at the polls, which may be attributable to intervening variables like violence, monetization of politics/politics of inducement, women’s triple burden, and so on, they are instructive and provide opportunities for effective advocacy for women’s political advancement.

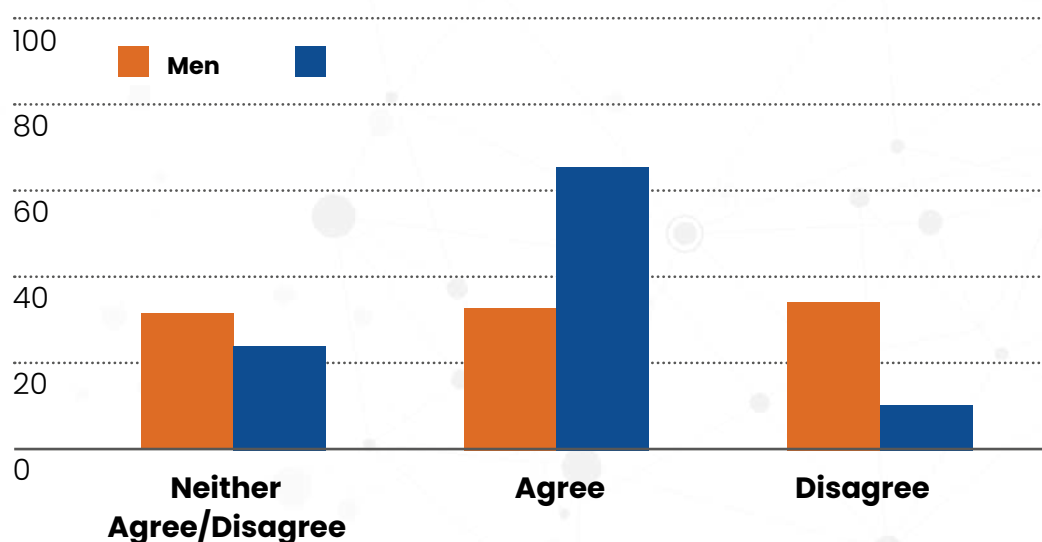


23 percent more men found a **30 percent gender quota more acceptable** than a requirement for equal female-to-male distribution in party candidacy.

²⁸ Nigeria Everyday (2018). Anger in Benue as female aspirant is ‘short-changed.’ October 9. Available at: <https://everyday.ng/2018/10/09/anger-in-benue-as-female-aspirant-is-short-changed/>. Accessed: July 25, 2019.

Figure 7.
Respondents
Requiring
Parties to
Increase Women
Candidates by
50%

Source: SAIS/PTCIJ
Survey, 2019



4.2.2. Patriarchal Barriers and Norms of Gender Discrimination

Women's low political participation in Nigerian society also results from certain pervasive structural factors derived from cultural norms and constraints. These pervasive gender roles serve to limit society's acceptance of women into specific roles traditionally identified with men. We identify two main factors: patriarchy and religious and cultural norms in this study.

- **Patriarchy**

Patriarchy has mounted practical barriers to women's access to political power in Nigeria. Patriarchy refers to a system of male domination that causes women's oppression in public and private spheres. The patriarchal choke on women's freedoms and political participation was reinforced by colonialism before independence³² and by militarism in the postcolonial history of Nigerian politics.



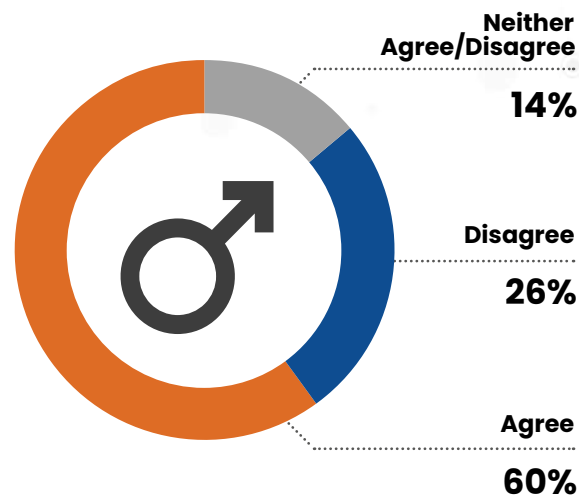
Patriarchy has mounted **practical barriers** to women's access to political power in Nigeria.

³² "Women's Protests in the Struggle for Independence" 2019. In the Oxford Handbook of Nigerian Politics. Eds. Carl Levan and Patrick Ukata. Oxford Publishers.

Patriarchal constraints on women's political participation implicate and reinforces cultural and social norms of gender discrimination, which assign gender roles that limit acceptance of women undertaking roles traditionally seen to be for men. Widespread gender stereotypes underlie political institutions and shape behavior of elites and electorate alike. These attitudes perpetuate gender inequality and hinder women's access to formal employment, with negative consequences for their financial independence, civil rights and political participation. Issues such as women's right to inherit land can be illustrative of prevailing attitudes towards gender equality. In our survey 26% of male and 10% of female respondents disagreed with the idea of men and women's equal rights to inherit the land, with a further 14% of men and 5% of women holding no strong opinion.

Figure 8.
Support of
Women's Equal
land Ownership &
Inheritance

Source: SAIS/PTCIJ
Survey, 2019

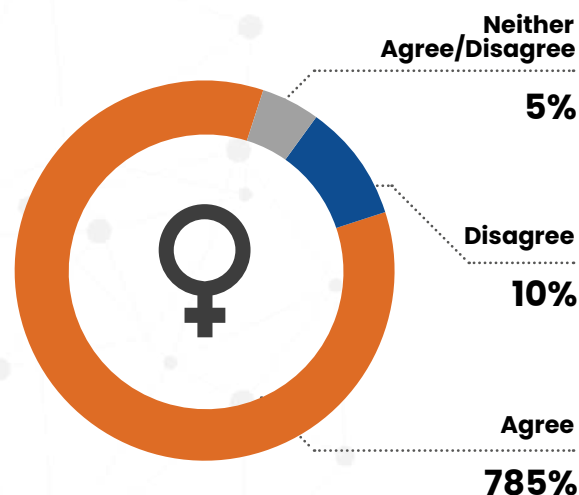


“Men

"Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land"

Figure 9.
Support of
Women's Equal
land ownership

Source: SAIS/PTCIJ
Survey, 2019



“Women

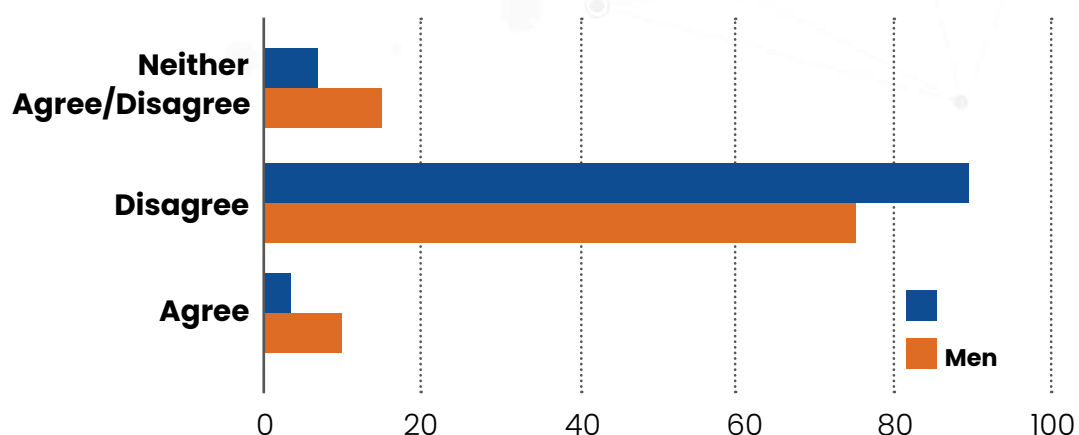
Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land"

- **Religious and Cultural Norms**

Gender discrimination, in this sense, is also often the outcome of a combination of religious and cultural norms, which persist across ethno-religious and class divides. Data from the survey show that the majority of men and women disagree with the statement that “society would be better if women stayed at home and did all the housework and childcare and the man worked to provide for the family” (see Figure 9). This pattern is consistent across responses to several survey questions that measure public attitude and perception to traditional norms and gender roles, even when categorized by education, urban-rural divide, occupation and religion. Interestingly, more men than women disagree with the traditional expectations that women remain in the home while men work outside the home to provide for the family.

Figure 10.
Respondents
who believe
society would
be better off
if traditional
roles are strictly
maintained

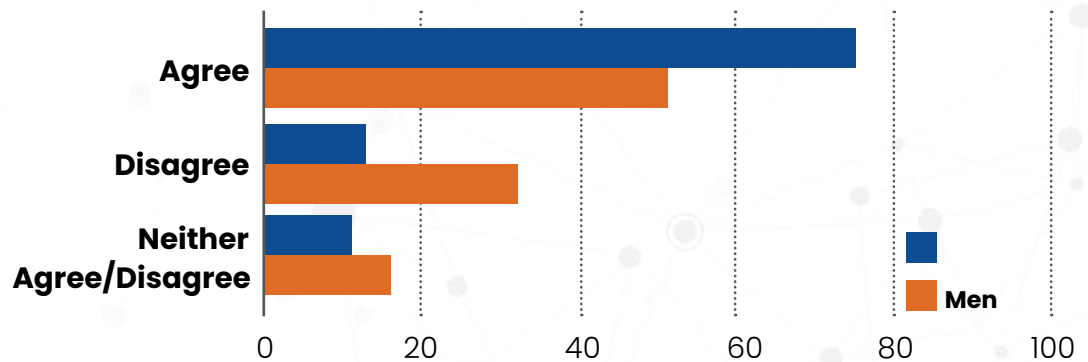
Source: SAIS/PTCIJ
Survey, 2019



Perhaps further illustrative of a growing shift in public attitudes towards women, the majority of the respondents believe that a woman can, in the future, be the president of Nigeria. However whilst almost 80% of women supported that statement, male respondents were less supportive at just over 50%. (see Figure 10).

Figure 11.
Percentage of
Respondents
who say a
Women can be
President

Source: SAIS/PTCIJ
Survey, 2019



Gender role incongruity, derived from role congruity theory in social psychology, explains the tendency for women to be seen as "extremely capable in arenas such as child-rearing and hosting, and in fact, often viewed as superior to men with regards to traits such as honesty and kindness, but they are not seen as having qualities associated with effective leadership like decisiveness and strength".³³ It argues that attributing different stereotypical traits to men and women, based on gender roles stemming from sex differentiation in the labor force, combined with established notions of a 'good leader' leads observers to undervalue women as potential and actual leaders. When adapted to electoral behavior, the theory suggests that bias stems from a mismatch between stereotyped traits of a candidate and beliefs about what makes a good leader.³⁴

However, data from the interviews and survey we undertook in Nigeria contradicts the gender role incongruity explanation of women's political marginalization. One of the themes that emerged from every interview conducted with men and women across the socio-economic and political spectrum was that men are not better politicians than women. Two-thirds of men surveyed disagreed or have no opinion with the statement that "men are better political leaders than women." That number is dramatically higher among women, with 80% of respondents disagreeing with the statement. This pattern is reflected in public perception of corruption and performance. The majority of respondents believe that women are likely to be just as corrupt as men when given the opportunity, whilst the idea that social and economic problems would improve if there were more women in politics is agreed with by less than half of respondents.

Data from
the interviews
and survey
we undertook
in Nigeria
contradicts
the gender
role
incongruity
explanation
of women's
political

³³ Lindsay Benstead et al., 2015. Is it Gender, Religiosity or Both? A Role Congruity Theory of Candidate Electability in Tunisia. Perspectives on Politics, Vol 13, No1.

³⁴ Ibid.

Figure 12.
Percentage of Respondents who believe Men are Better Political Leaders than Women

Source: SAIS/PTCIJ Survey, 2019

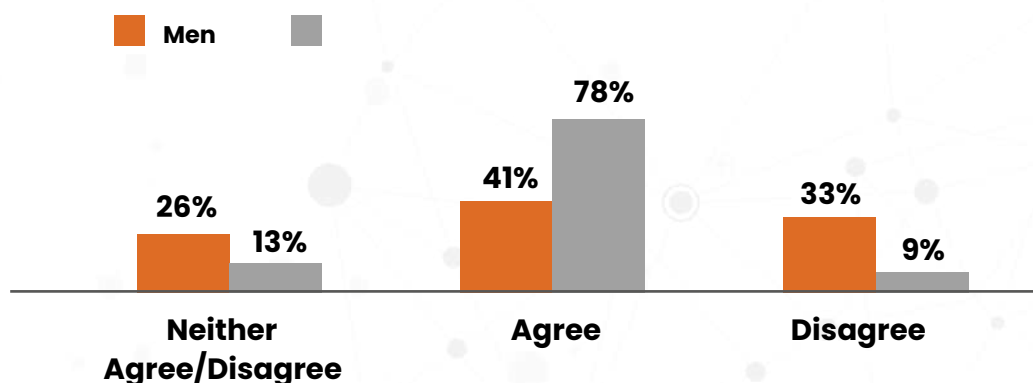
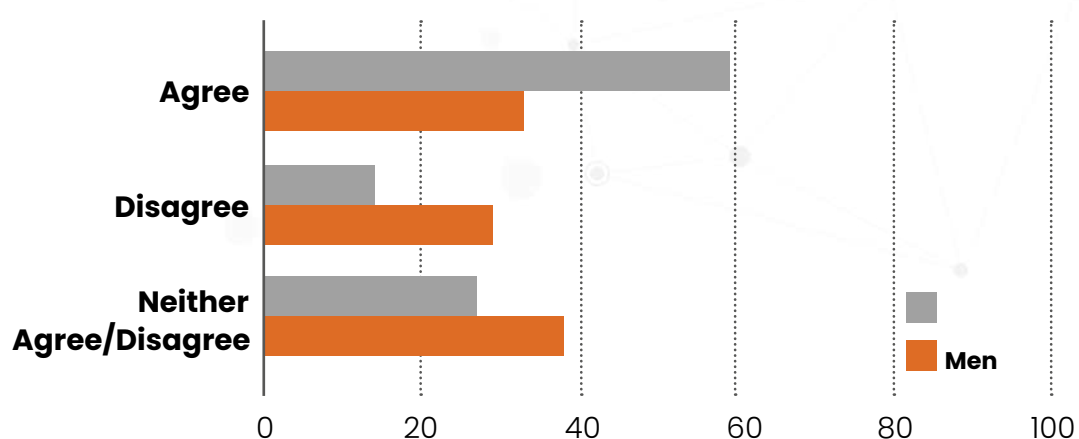


Figure 13.
Respondents Who Believe Social and Economic Problems Would Improve with More Women in Politics

Source: SAIS/PTCIJ Survey, 2019



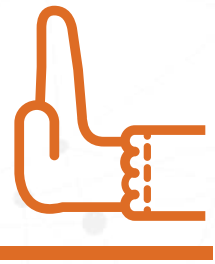
Our survey results suggest women's political marginalization does not primarily stem from a belief that women are not suited to political office or that women are less effective than men as political leaders. A sentiment shared by, Chioma Agwuegbo, an advocate for increased women's political participation, and echoed by other women interviewees, is that women's political marginalization in Nigeria is mostly the result of fear – specifically men's fear that women will “take over” once given the opportunity. She argued that while men act out of fear to marginalize women, they are yet to interrogate said fear. Contending that men mask their fears of women's enterprise and capacity to excel through patriarchal bellicosity and the use of other tactics like intimidation, threats of and actual violence and personal attacks.

4.2.3. Women Gate-Keepers

While not necessarily a new phenomenon, the role of women as gatekeepers within the parties was underscored by women candidates and members of the civil society during the interviews. Women are just as critical at minimizing of women candidates' abilities and capacities as men; and are more likely to perceive men as more capable than women as a result of socialization. The nature of media messaging and portrayal of women reinforces this "false consciousness" in women and makes them unwitting allies of men, in keeping women out of power.

Although the women's leader position was created to represent and advocate for women's interest in decision-making, most of the young women politicians interviewed insist that women leaders in parties are used by party patrons and elites to keep the women at bay: away from intra-party substantive discussions and negotiations that shape resource and power distribution. Party women leaders, as such, essentially become enforcers of patriarchal control and bellicosity, including the adjudication of the morality of young women party candidates by training candidates in the art of party-patron subservience (which increases their vulnerability to sexual harassment and assault) and other practices that impedes their chances of success.

Several of the young women we interviewed, most of whom lost at the primaries noted their disdain for the position of the "woman leader" within the parties, framing her as complicit in women's exclusion through party structures. According to Ndi Kato, who contested the Kaduna State House under the PDP, the women's wing of the party does a disservice to young and upcoming women politicians through their "continued adoption of a posture of subservience to men in the party."



Most of the young women politicians interviewed insist that **women leaders in parties are used by party patrons and elites to keep the women at bay:** away from intra-party substantive discussions and negotiations that shape resource and power distribution.

In a sentiment echoed by other young women politicians, she argued that any meaningful progress in women's status within political parties has to involve the abolition of the position of the woman leader. Women should be appointed as members of the party leadership just as men. Sewuese Bem, who contested for Benue State House of Assembly under the People's Redemption Party (PRP), had a view of women party leaders. "We have the equivalent of godfatherism. There are godfathers, and there are godmothers."³⁵ Other young women aspirants and candidates, speaking on the condition of anonymity agreed that the position of the woman leader has become more of a tool for excluding women than including them within the party.

The role of the First Lady in shaping the political landscape for women in Nigeria was also discussed. Nigeria has a long history of first ladies, who have been politically active in ways that closed up the political space for women's participation. They have not tolerated the emergence of other powerful women on the political scene in order to keep the spotlight on themselves. They have also used the position to advance the agenda of their husbands, however detrimental it was to women's empowerment.³⁶

Those who criticize the office of the First Lady and her role in women's political marginalization do so with good reason. However, just as the role of the first lady can be weaponized against women, it can also be instrumental in opening up the political space. Many continue to tout Patience Jonathan, the wife of former President Goodluck Jonathan's influence on the Goodluck Jonathan administration's efforts to promote a better gender balance within his political dispensation. This has not been the case in the current administration, where Buhari publicly declared that his administration does not recognize the office of the first lady.



Nigeria has a long history of **first ladies**, who have been politically active in ways that **closed up the political space** for women's participation.

³⁵ Telephone interview with Sewuese Bem on July 26, 2019.

³⁶ For example, see Amina Mama's thesis on femocracy. Mama, A. (1995). Feminism or femocracy? State feminism and democratisation in Nigeria. *Africa Development/Afrique et Développement*, 37-58.

4.2.4. Securitization and Insecurity

The context of violent conflict and the consequence of an increasingly militarized electoral process has limited women's political participation. Despite the Nigerian Code of Conduct (Article 6) which states "no political party shall engage in violent activities of any kind, as a way of demonstrating its strength. All political parties shall publicly condemn any form of political violence" (Article 6)," and that, "every political party shall ensure the promotion of active participation of women, youth and the physically challenged in the electoral processes" (Article 9) parties have ratcheted up their use of violence as a tool of political suppression. In many instances, they sanction the use of violence as a deterrence to the political participation.

The 2019 general elections were deemed the most contentious in history by INEC. The violence was exacerbated by bitter rivalries during the contentious party primaries amongst ethno-regional and intra/inter-party patrons.³⁷ Five months after the general elections, INEC says that it has over 800 lawsuits regarding the primary elections.³⁸ Beyond contentions and infightings between party members or rivals, elections in Nigeria have a history of violence, in the pre and post voting period.

In 2011, gubernatorial elections were postponed when violence broke out after the presidential elections. That same year an estimated 800 people were killed in northern states, including INEC core and ad hoc staff.³⁹ In 2015 the general elections were postponed by six weeks owing to the state of insecurity, especially in northern Nigeria. Records show that in the 2019 elections cycle, there were at least 67 violent incidents across the country, leading to over 230 deaths.⁴⁰ While INEC tracks violence against its staff, including women, the state does not track electoral violence against women, making it harder to prosecute perpetrators.



Records show that in the 2019 elections cycle, there were at least 67 violent incidents across the country, leading to over 230 deaths.

³⁷ <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/07/09/inec-2019-elections-most-acrimonious-in-nigerias-history/>

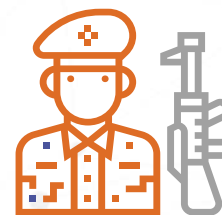
³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ NDI (2011), p. 50

⁴⁰ SBM Intelligence (2019) Mounting Electoral Violence. Available at: <https://www.sbmintel.com/2019/02/mounting-election-violence/>. Accessed: August 22, 2019.

In addition to these broader forms of violence, women face other specific types of violence or threats. Often, women politicians are not merely maneuvered out of political spaces; they are sometimes threatened with violence if they continue to pursue their political interests.⁴¹ For example, Natasha Apkoti, who contested the Kogi Central Senatorial District was arrested, received death threats and her family's house was burnt down during her 2019 campaign. Women who have been threatened with physical violence within campaign and electioneering often back out of the race.

The Nigeria state's response to this history of electoral violence has been to increasingly militarize elections processes. It has now become standard practice to have heavy security presence deployed to various polling units across the country, including police, military and secret police.⁴² These have implications for women's participation, both as electorate and candidates. Given that women remain the primary caregivers in the family, many women are disinclined to participate in elections with such an obvious potential for violence. Besides, during electoral violence, participants are more often than not men, with women forced to endure the repercussions.



The Nigeria state's response to this history of electoral violence has been to **increasingly militarize elections processes.**

⁴¹NDI (2011), p. 45

⁴²ICG (2019) Nigeria's 2019 Elections: Six States to Watch, p. 6. Available at: https://d207landvip0wj.cloudfront.net/268-nigerias-2019-elections_0.pdf. Ehiabhi, V. (2015) 900 SSS Official Storm Osun Ahead Governorship Election. <https://www.legit.ng/70514.html>.

5. FINAL OBSERVATIONS: TRENDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Emerging Trends

In what follows, we outline observed trends from the 2019 electoral cycle. We identify these trends as important factors that affected electoral outcomes for women candidates and highlight their relevance for political outcomes in the next national elections in 2023.

5.1.1. Geopolitical Trends

Fewer women are involved in political processes, both as candidates or the electorate (as registered voters), in the north (north-west, north-east, and north-central) than in the south (south-west, south-east, and south-south). This may reflect the combined effects of socio-economic factors and the ongoing extremist violence in the north-east. But is also likely a reflection of the general notions of gender that exists within these communities, where women's place and role is limited to reproduction ("the other room") and domesticity ("the kitchen").



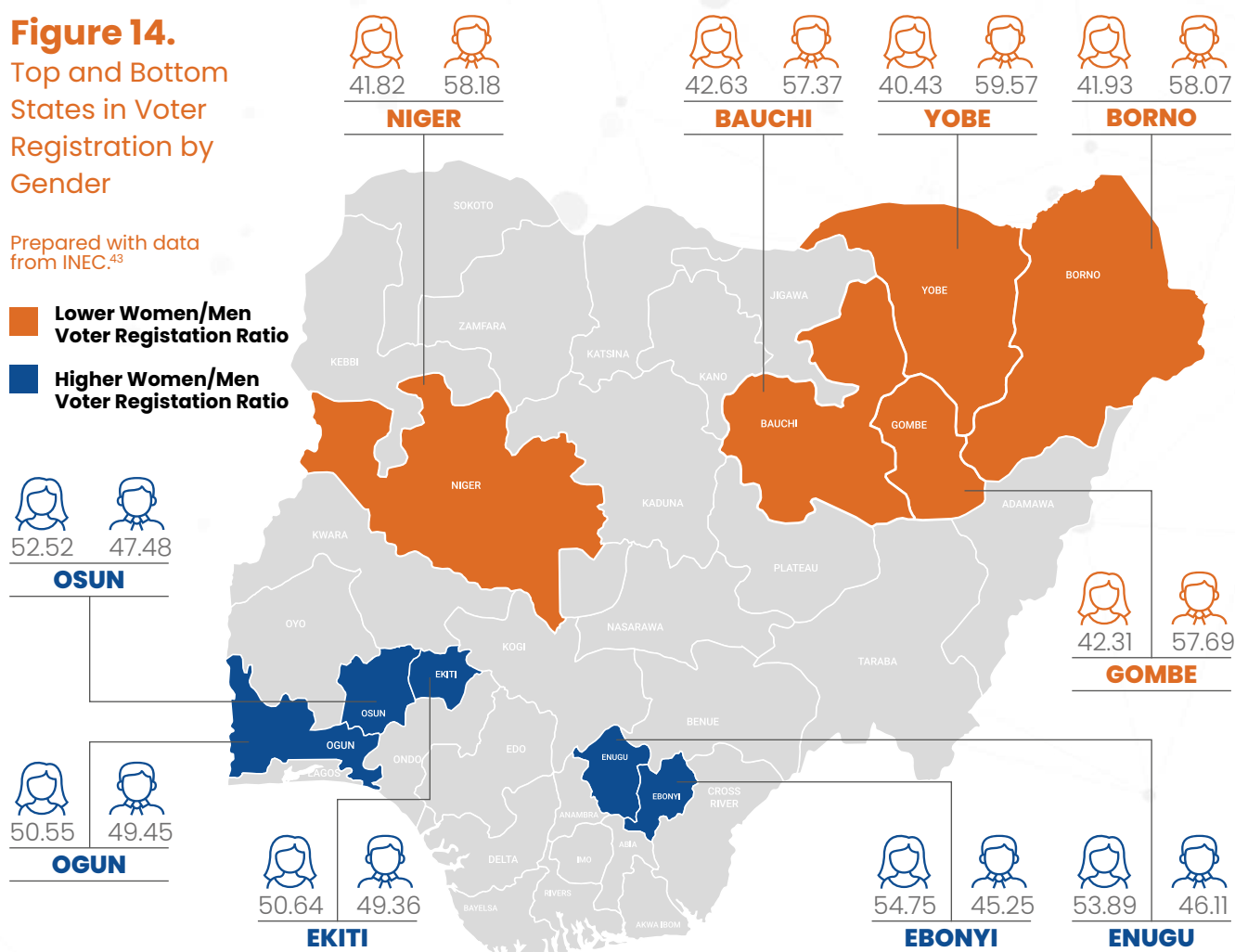
Fewer women are involved in political processes, both as candidates or the electorate, in the north than in the south.



Figure 14.
Top and Bottom
States in Voter
Registration by
Gender

Prepared with data
from INEC.⁴³

**Lower Women/Men
Voter Registration Ratio**
**Higher Women/Men
Voter Registration Ratio**



In addition to the impact of the state of security in The north-east on voter registration, we observe the poor representation of women candidates in specific regions of the country. States like Borno, Katsina, Plateau, and Yobe had no female gubernatorial candidates. A possible explanation for this is that parties erected barriers to prevent them running. For example, women from Zamfara state alleged that the leadership of the ruling party APC barred them from contesting for positions into the national assembly and declined to sell them the requisite nomination and expression of interest forms. No woman from Zamfara contested for the Senate or the House of Representatives across all political parties in 2019.

⁴³ The 10 states fall under four geopolitical zones- Top Five: South-East (Ebonyi, Enugu) and South-West (Osun, Ekiti, Ogun). Bottom Five: North-East (Borno, Yobe, Gombe, and Bauchi) and North-Central (Niger).

Table 3.

**Big vs. Small Parties:
Percentage of
Women Candidates
in 2019 Federal
Elections**

Source: Prepared with Data
from INEC

	STATE	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN CANDIDATES	
		Senate	Governorship
1	Abia	13.6	9.4
2	Adamawa	20.0	29.0
3	Akwa Ibom	23.5	4.4
4	Anambra	15.6	No elections
5	Bauchi	2.3	3.2
6	Bayelsa	9.1	No elections
7	Benue	17.0	9.1
8	Borno	2.6	0
9	Cross River	7.9	7.7
10	Delta	17.7	16
11	Ebonyi	8.8	8.1
12	Edo	9.1	No elections
13	Ekiti	11.1	No elections
14	Enugu	25.5	11.9
15	Gombe	14.3	3.1
16	Imo	13.3	5.7
17	Jigawa	2.6	5.3
18	Kaduna	8.9	5.3
19	Kano	3.5	16.4
20	Katsina	3.0	0
21	Kebbi	10.4	3.2
22	Kogi	9.6	No elections
23	Kwara	12.3	5.7
24	Lagos	36	15.6
25	Nassarawa	8.9	3.5
26	Niger	12.5	6.5
27	Ogun	11.7	2.4
28	Ondo	9.8	No elections
29	Osun	22.2	No elections
30	Oyo	12.7	11.9
31	Plateau	10.0	0
32	Rivers	20.3	6.25
33	Sokoto	4.5	3.9
34	Taraba	4.4	6.7
35	Yobe	7.1	0
36	Zamfara	0	4.9
37	Federal Capital Territory	31.3	-

5.1.2. Executive Vs. Legislative Contestations

Executive roles – the presidency and state governorship – have so far proven to be out of reach for women in Nigeria. In the 2019 elections, women made up 6 (out of 73) presidential and 79 (out of 1,145) governorship candidates; a mere 8% and 7%, respectively. None of them were elected.

This is not due to a lack of qualifications. Half of the female presidential candidates in the 2019 elections showed significant educational achievement, with two Ph.D. holders and one lawyer. Comparatively, only 17% of the male candidates had comparable academic qualifications. This is important to note since the competence of women candidates often comes to question in their bid to contest in competitive spaces with men. While educational achievement is not necessarily a reflection of political competence, the pedigree of these women is an indicator of the additional expectations usually placed on women. They are required to prove their competence, while men's competence is unquestioned and assumed.

As the outcomes over the years have shown, women candidates, no matter how qualified they are, face a much higher hurdle than their male counterparts. One explanation for this trend is that executive positions grant broad-based power, which many parties remain unwilling to give to women. More so, given the massive monetization of politics, only a few women have the kind of resources to contest executive positions competitively. According to this Westminster Foundation for Democracy report, a successful House of Representatives campaign in the Nigerian 2015 elections cost about USD 700, 000.⁴⁴ Some of the associated costs include: advertising, campaign tours and other associated, if un-ethical costs, such as payment to campaign supporters and voters.⁴⁵

Furthermore, women tend to perform better in community-indicative



Half of the female presidential candidates in the 2019 elections showed **significant educational achievement**, with two Ph.D. holders and one lawyer.

⁴⁴ ThWestminster Foundation for Democracy (2015) Cost of Politics. Available at: <https://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Research-WFD-Cost-of-Politics-Synthesis-Report.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

political spaces, such as the national assembly, where they can curry community support without necessarily appearing threatening to men⁴⁶ The acceptability of women in these legislative positions is evidenced in elections outcomes since 1999.⁴⁷



5.1.3. Highly Educated Female Presidential Candidates: The Question of Qualification and Competence

Fifty percent of all female presidential candidates (3 of 6) in the 2019 elections entered the contest with significant educational achievement, with two Ph.D. holders and one lawyer. Comparatively, only 17% of the male candidates were similarly qualified as these women, a noteworthy phenomenon since the competence of women candidates often comes to question in their bid to contest in competitive spaces with men. While educational achievement is not necessarily a reflection of political competence, the pedigree of these women is an indicator of the general expectations usually placed on women – both externally and by women aspirants themselves. Women are required to prove their competence, while men's competence is unquestioned and assumed. In the survey conducted for this study, 33% of the male respondents thought that men were better politicians than women. Besides, only 41% of the male respondents, compared to 78% of female respondents, disagreed with the idea of men's political superiority. As the outcomes over the years have shown, women candidates, no matter how qualified they are, face a much higher hurdle than their male counterparts.

Women are required to prove their competence, while men's competence is unquestioned and assumed.

⁴⁶ We thank gender activist Nana Nwachukwu for highlighting this point. Interview conducted on February 24, 2019/Abuja, Nigeria.

⁴⁷ See Figure 3.

5.1.4. Voter Registration Dynamics: Understanding Women's Support Bases

Given Nigeria's population in which gender distribution stands at an estimated 51% male and 49% female, it is reasonable to expect similar dynamics in voter registration across the individual 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). According to INEC, 2019 voter registration disaggregated by gender showed a male to female representation of 52.56% to 47.14%.

Broken down, however, these numbers show an interesting pattern within individual states, depicting higher women electorate participation than men in certain states like Ebonyi and Enugu but equally significantly lower women participation in others like Niger and Yobe. One plausible projection to make is that states with higher women voter registration could indicate more gender-equal communities, and women candidates could hold greater advantage than their male peers in these states given women's support base.⁴⁸ A further voter registration data distribution, this time by occupation, shows that housewives made up 14.10% of the electorate. This occupational group was topped only by farmers/fisherfolk at 16.23%.

Given women's poor showing in the elections, one doubts whether this translated to electoral advantage for women candidates? Why was this so? While there are no ready answers to this question, one nevertheless wonders what factors could have prevented them from voting? Or whether women are likely to vote for female candidates more than male counterparts.



One plausible projection to make is that **states with higher women voter registration could indicate more gender-equal communities**, and women candidates could hold greater advantage than their male peers in these states given women's support base.

⁴⁸ Assuming that women vote for other women.

5.1.5. Data for Evidence-Based Policy Making

While women's less than successful performance in the 2019 elections is concerning, it presents real opportunities for growth. Part of the issue with women's political participation has been the shortage of empirical data to support evidence-based policy-making around women's political participation. Women's increased participation essentially provides an experimental sample size for data, which is valuable for building capacity for further and deeper engagements.⁴⁹

5.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.2.1. Democratizing Political Parties to Expand Women's Roles

Strengthen the accountability of political parties, which are the ground zero for women's political participation. This should include incentivizing political parties to adopt equitable and inclusive intraparty policies and structures to create a more equal footing for women's political participation. While international actors should continue to avoid undue interference with national politics, they should partner with relevant domestic civil society actors, women's movements, lawmakers and other stakeholders to facilitate parties' adoption of temporary special measures to increase women's participation; including minimally acceptable 33% gender quotas. Additionally, the coalition should aim to facilitate a change in party policies and practices that constrain women's opportunities. Incorporating more women into party leadership through quotas and supporting intra and inter party coalitions of women would be some positive initial steps.



While international actors should continue to avoid undue interference with national politics, they **should partner with relevant domestic civil society actors, women's movements, lawmakers and other stakeholders to facilitate parties' adoption of temporary special measures to increase women's participation.**

⁴⁹ Gleaned from an interview conducted with Cynthia Mbamalu, Program Manager for Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA).

5.2.2. Leveraging Changes in Societal Norms

Changes in societal norms like those that have allowed women to vote and stand for office after a long history of disenfranchisement highlights opportunities that can be leveraged for enhanced women's political participation. As patterns of productive and reproductive structures change, family economic imperatives drive broader changes in patterns of socialization. Promoters of women's political participation have an opportunity to highlight the inevitability of women's equal access to power. Encouraging stakeholders including traditional chiefs, party elites, government officials and conservative women elites to make history by becoming change-makers and early adopters can be a focus of advocacy campaigns.

Telling the stories of female presidential and National Assembly aspirants can be used to attract young people into politics, including young women. The coalition of democracy promoters will need to use images of these female role models to communicate, train, sensitize and educate voters and parties through programing to fully and equally engage women politicians.



Telling the stories of female presidential and National Assembly aspirants can be used to **attract young people into politics**, including young women.



5.2.3. Preventing Political Violence Against Women

Legislating and enforcing laws to prevent, protect, and respond to political violence against women is key to increasing women's political participation, especially in Nigeria's violence-prone elections. Political violence against women describe threats and acts of violence against women candidates and voters during electoral campaigns as well as strategic efforts aimed at discouraging women from participating and influencing women's patterns of participation during voting. Government should commit to strong legislations and build increased cooperation with civil society actors to undertake and map risk assessments; establish early warning signals; engage the media as partners through responsible reportage; signal strong but just prosecutorial commitment to purveyors of hate speech and violence incitement; examine gendered political violence in post-election analysis and reports and design education and similar programming to pre-emptively combat future incidents.



Political violence against women describe threats and acts of violence against women candidates and voters during electoral campaigns as well as strategic efforts aimed at **discouraging women from participating** and influencing women's patterns of participation during voting.

5.2.4. Private Sector Support

Whereas the Electoral Act has regulations on campaign financing, we suggest that private sector actors and development agencies can play a support role for women candidates, who typically do not have adequate resources to finance their candidacy throughout the electoral cycle. This could be done through an equitable process that allows women to tender their proposals to businesses looking to support women's political participation at the local, state, or national levels.

This could be done by stakeholders with direct interests in specific sectors of the economy, to support female candidates whose campaign promises directly relate to these interests. For instance, producers of female sanitary products can support female candidates in the push for tax-free or free sanitary products for girls in primary and secondary schools.

5.2.5. Educational/Training Support for Women Candidates/Politicians

Women candidates, especially inexperienced candidates, continue to require training support and mentorship. Multiple layers of support should be offered to candidates as they go through the various stages of their candidacy. Training needs often differ geographically and should be tailored accordingly. As the candidacy spread in past elections show, the political space appears more accessible for women in certain southern states, such as Enugu and Imo. Targeting these states with training that covers practical skill requirements such as electioneering, campaigning, media relations and campaign financing can support a push for greater female representation. As also indicated in this report, younger women politicians expressed the desire for mentorship from more experienced female politicians. More experienced politicians would, therefore, be ideal trainers in certain contexts.



Women candidates, especially inexperienced candidates, continue to require training support and mentorship. Multiple layers of support should be offered to candidates as they go through the various stages of their candidacy.

5.2.6. Lessons for Women Politicians and Democracy Developers

Women politicians should take lessons from their experience in 2019. Part of the issue with women and political participation has been the absence of data to facilitate evidence-based learning. Women's increased participation currently provides good data for measuring gender gaps to support institutional and resource access; building campaign models that work for women; predicting and strategically integrating women into parties' agenda for each election cycle; and teaching women best practices in politicking and electioneering. Lessons can be learned from the opportunities highlighted in this report, as well as the challenges. Pooling strengths can help women present a more united front and leverage this bargaining clout to negotiate better affirmative action policies at the party and national levels.

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