

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF MEDIA ADVOCACY PORTRAYAL AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF WOMEN IN NIGERIAN POLITICS: A CASE STUDY OF 2007 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY GENERAL ELECTION.

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Abstract

This study empirically examines the relationship between media advocacy portrayals and public perceptions of women's participation in Nigerian National Assembly politics, using the 2007 General Election as a case study. It investigates how the strategic deployment of advocacy shapes societal attitudes toward female politicians within a socio-political context characterised by entrenched gender stereotypes and structural barriers to women's political representation. Utilizing Agenda-Setting Theory and Media Framing Theory, the study analyses the extent to which media advocacy prioritised women's policy platforms and framed their political competence, leadership capacity, and legitimacy. Adopting a quantitative research design, the study utilised a structured questionnaire administered to 200 enrolled respondents across the Federal Capital Territory, selected through stratified sampling to ensure demographic diversity. Findings indicate that media advocacy portrayals significantly influence public opinion: 70% of respondents exposed to positive media framing acknowledged the competence and leadership potential of female politicians, while 30% reported exposure to negative portrayals that reinforced stereotypes and undermined women's political legitimacy. Major challenges identified include patriarchy, restrictive cultural norms, and inadequate access to balanced political information. Although support for gender quotas is relatively high (65%), resistance persists among specific demographic groups. The findings further reveal enduring gendered perceptions of leadership, with women frequently characterised as empathetic yet insufficiently decisive. The study concludes that media advocacy plays critical role in reshaping political narratives and advancing women's inclusion in politics. It recommends sustained media reform, public enlightenment, and policy interventions aimed at dismantling structural and cultural barriers to gender equitable political representation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Media, Women, Politics, Advocacy, Public, Perception.

Introduction

The media, often regarded as the fourth estate, hold immense power in shaping societal values and perceptions, particularly concerning gender roles. In Nigeria, the portrayal of women in the media significantly influences how the public perceives female political actors, affecting their legitimacy and prospects within the political arena. As Segal and Demos (2019) highlight, media images do not merely reflect society but actively shape it by assigning and reinforcing specific values, appearances, and roles based on gender. Historically, Nigerian media have often depicted women through a narrow lens, perpetuating traditional stereotypes that confine them to limited social roles. Abiola (1996) notes that the media frequently attempt to dictate women's roles, positioning them within predefined frameworks that undermine their autonomy and political ambitions. This trend

is especially pronounced in the political sphere, where female politicians face media portrayals that can objectify, marginalize, or question their capabilities and legitimacy.

The impact of gender-bias portrayals against women in the media is profound. According to Oyesomi and Oyero (2014), the way female politicians are framed in Nigerian media plays a critical role in shaping public opinion, influencing not only attitudes towards women in leadership but also their political participation and electoral success. Yet, the media's influence is complex: while often reinforcing stereotypes, it can also serve as a platform for promoting women's political empowerment and leadership. In Nigeria, media coverage of women in politics present representations that portray that alternate between bias, neutrality, and active support. Understanding this dynamic is essential to addressing the challenges women face in politics and leveraging media as a tool for advancing gender equality in political representation. Consequently, this study investigates how media portrayal shapes public perception of women in politics.

Media Advocacy and the Participation of Women in Politics

The study argues that despite the influence of traditional media reportage in raising awareness on the factors that limit the participation of women in politics, it did not significantly translate to an increased numbers of women in leadership due to the framing, tone and visibility of women in the traditional media. Media advocacy is the strategic use of mass media to influence public policy and opinion (Staples, 2009). It involves deliberately framing issues in the public sphere to influence both policy outcomes and social norms. Over the years, it has been employed by gender rights organizations to counteract negative portrayals and promote positive narratives about women in politics. Media advocacies for gender parity are particularly aimed at promoting women's participation and contributing to their success and potential equality.

Media advocacy initiatives are enabling platforms that promote women's inclusion at all levels of political participation. They are particularly intentional in promoting women's participation and contributing to their success and potential equality. Media advocacy has influenced women's participation, electorates' awareness, and overall engagement in the political process. While there are still significant barriers, these advocacies aim to educate the public about the importance of women's political participation. Their canvass for political parity in Nigeria using the mass media. In the context of gender portrayal, media advocacy can prioritise the issue of underrepresentation by repeatedly highlighting the absence of women in leadership roles and calling for gender-sensitive electoral reforms (PLAC 2018). For instance, studies have successfully reframed narratives around women's leadership capabilities by emphasising their contributions to governance and development rather than focusing solely on their roles as mothers or caregivers (Košir & Tomažič, 2024). These advocacies help to dismantle long-standing stereotypes that position women as less suitable for leadership. Some media advocacies include:

- Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternatives (WRAPA)
- The Affirmative Action Campaign
- UN WOMEN

They use the media to advocate for political and leadership parity. This has significantly framed women's inclusivity in the political consciousness of the people and the society is yielding to the

media conversations considering the outcome of the public perception of the survey. These initiatives utilized various media channels, including television, radio, print media, and social media, to disseminate information, challenge stereotypes, and inspire women to engage in politics. Through storytelling, awareness campaigns, and advocacy, these efforts aimed to address the gender gap in Nigerian politics and create a more inclusive political environment. Changing the negative portrayals requires sustained advocacy and capacity-building initiatives that emphasise the importance of diversity and inclusiveness in media content (UN Women 2021).

The Media and Women

The portrayal of women in the media has long been a subject of various critical debates. Gallagher (2001) notes that women are often portrayed in narrow, stereotypical ways in the media. To address this, the media should challenge stereotypes and objectification, reshaping perceptions of women. Through communication, the media influence public perceptions of women's political eligibility, shaping societal gender roles and influencing women's opportunities in politics. In every society, public attitudes regarding women's roles are major factors in determining their status, and the media play a strong role in shaping these attitudes. Media portrayals of women are significantly important because these images are ultimately reflected in societal attitudes toward women over time (Omojola & Morah 2014, Harvey 2020).

Ojebuyi and Chukwunwike (2018) reveal a gender disparity in political media coverage, showing that male political aspirants receive more visibility and intense coverage in Nigerian national dailies compared to their female counterparts. This disparity persists despite advocacy efforts for gender equality in political representation. Agbalajobi (2010) highlights the difficulties and prospects of women's participation in Nigerian politics, while Ette and Akpan-Obong (2023) and Ette (2017) argue that underrepresentation and misrepresentation stem largely from media content and consumption patterns, with men dominating media spaces and often overlooking women's roles in sustainable development.

Media representation plays a vital role in making politics more gender-sensitive and inclusive. Corrigan-Brown and Wilkes (2014) emphasize that media content and citizen engagement, shaped by media portrayal, can either reinforce or challenge equality and inequality in society. Consequently, media messages may be supportive, neutral, or biased toward women in politics.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks: Agenda-Setting Theory and Media Framing Theory, which together provide a robust analytical lens for examining how media advocacy influences public perceptions of women in Nigerian politics.

Agenda-Setting Theory: One of its foremost propounder McCombs & Shaw, 1972 posits that the mass media do not tell people *what* to think, but significantly influence *what* people think *about* by selecting which issues and actors are made salient in public discourse (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In the context of political communication, the frequency, prominence, and bordering of media coverage determine the public's perception of political relevance, priorities, and legitimacy of political actors (McCombs, 2005). This is particularly significant in elections, where limited

airtime and editorial decisions shape the visibility and perceived importance of candidates and their platforms.

Media Framing Theory: Entman's (1993) media framing theory explores how presenting an issue in the media influences public understanding and interpretation. Unlike agenda-setting, which focuses on which issues are covered, framing theory examines how these issues are presented (Entman, 1993). Goffman (1974), who propounded the theory, argued that "interpretive designs," or "frames", are essential to cultural belief systems, helping individuals make sense of the world. Frames are cognitive structures that simplify information, enabling people to organize and interpret events coherently. Beyond filters, frames also shape and reconstruct reality, allowing the interpretation of experiences in ways that influence broader understanding. This highlights the remarkable role of framing in shaping perceptions and collective beliefs.

Borah (2011) claims that researchers have consistently shown framing to significantly influence people's decisions and choices. The theory involves selecting specific aspects of perceived reality to emphasize, making them more prominent and persuasive. By simplifying complex issues, framing effectively mobilizes support and drives action. Borah (2011) postulates that:

Besides examining media frames, researchers have most enthusiastically studied the process involved in the formation of the audience frame. There is much research that demonstrates how news framing influences information processing and the subsequent decision-making processes. (p.248)

Media framing theory encompasses a multitude of concepts that revolve around the production and distribution of information that enhances framing. Borah's statement above reveals that framing influences a phenomenon, aiding people's decisions. Accordingly, media framing involves making information more salient to promote a particular interpretation through frames (Entman, 1993).

Methodology

This study used a quantitative research approach, employing a structured questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection. The survey was distributed to a total of 200 enrolled participants across the six Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). A stratified sampling technique was adopted to ensure that respondents were selected from various sub-groups within each Area Council, to ensure a representative sample across different demographic category. Consequently, the collected data were analysed using simple percentage calculations, and the results are presented in a tabular form for clarity and ease of interpretation.

Relevance of Agenda-Setting Theory and Media Framing Theory to The Study.

In the case of the 2007 Nigerian General Election, Agenda-Setting Theory, and Media Framing Theory provide valuable frameworks for understanding how media advocacy portrayals framed women as electable, and influenced public perceptions of women candidates in National Assembly politics. If media coverage prioritised male candidates or focused on gender-neutral or stereotype-driven narratives about women, the public's agenda defined by what issues and actors it deemed significant would likewise be one-sided. Empirical research shows that when the media under-

emphasise women's candidacies or place them outside the central agenda of political reporting, audiences are less likely to perceive women as legitimate contenders or serious political figures (Cushion & Lewis, 2024; Ross, 2018).

In gender and politics, framing theory is essential for understanding how media narratives shape public perceptions of female politicians. Studies on how women are framed in the media - whether as competent leaders, emotional figures, or passive actors significantly influence how the public perceives them (Segal & Demos, 2019).

Agenda-Setting's relevance is further supported by recent comparative studies indicating that media systematically influence electoral perceptions through selection and prominence of coverage (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2022). In democratic transitions, especially in developing climes like Nigeria, media choices about who and what to cover during elections can either reinforce existing gender inequalities or help recalibrate the political agenda to include previously marginalised voices (Okoro, 2019; Yousif, 2022). Therefore, applying Agenda-Setting Theory enables an empirical analysis of media advocacy portrayal and public perception of women in Nigerian politics and how this shaped public perception and support.

For example, awareness advocating for the ratification and implementation of the Maputo Protocol -a key regional treaty aimed at promoting women's rights and gender equality succeeded in raising public awareness and securing the commitment of Nigerian policymakers to the treaty's provisions. Media coverage of the Maputo Protocol's gender parity goals created a platform for public debate on the need for more inclusive political representation, contributing to a broader discourse on gender equality in governance (Oyekanmi 2021). Accordingly, agenda-setting theory explains how the media influence the issues the public considers important by giving certain topics prominence, in the context of the 2007 Nigerian General Election, the theory helps explain how media advocacy affected public awareness and prioritization of women's participation in National Assembly politics. When women are underrepresented or marginalized in media content, the public is less likely to view their political participation as significant or legitimate. Drawing on Agenda-Setting Theory, the research examines the extent to which media advocacy prioritised discussion of women's policy platforms versus their gender identity or personal lives (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Okoro, 2019).

Additionally, WRAPA's efforts extended beyond national boundaries by raising awareness of international frameworks like the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), ratified by Nigeria in 2004. WRAPA's advocacy helped initiate discussions on the domestication of international protocols related to women's rights and inclusivity, fostering an environment conducive to reforms both at national and subnational levels. This campaign contributes to the growing discourse on women's political inclusion.

Media advocacy, along with active political participation by women, are essential to ensure that women's roles in leadership and decision-making are adequately represented in elective positions. 2007 (the 6th Assembly) witnessed the highest inclusion of women in Nigerian National Assembly with women winning 9 seats in the senate, and 27 seats in Federal House of representatives. Notable female political figures emerging in the political landscape of Nigeria include Nkechi

Justina Nwaogu, Grace Folashade Bent, Eme UfotEkaette, Joy Emordi, Chris Anyanwu, Gbemisola Saraki, Patricia Akwashiki, Zainab Kure, Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello, in the senate and Nnenna Elendu-Ukeje,, Nkiru Onyejeocha, Uche Ekwunife, Lynda Chuba Ikpeazu, Binta Masi Garba, Alaga Christiana, Mercy Almona-Isei, Doris Uboh, Elizabeth O Ogbaga, Raji Rasaki Fatima, Akindahunsi Titilayo, Akinwale Florence Atinuke, Peace Uzoamaka Nnaji, Juliet Akano, Saudatu Sani, Halima Hassan Tukur, Maimunat Adaji, Nimota Suleiman, Abike Dabiri Eruwa, Olajumoke Okoya-Thomas, Etteh Patricia Olubunmi, Mulikat Adeola Akande, Beni Lar, Martha H. Bodunrin, Apiafe Okagua Betty, Khadija Bukar Abba-Ibrahim, Falake Olunloyo Oshinowo in the federal house of representatives.

The National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has not witnessed a female senate president since the inception of Nigeria as a country, while Patricia Etteh became the 10th speaker (first female Speaker) of the House of Representatives of Nigeria in 2007 (though her tenure was short-lived) but it portends a new horizon for the women.

Result

The survey included 200 enrolled respondents from diverse political backgrounds aimed to gauge public perceptions of female political candidates and the impact of media advocacy portrayals on these perceptions.

Table 1 Gender Distribution of Respondents

S/N	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Female	80	40%
2	Male	120	60%
Total		200	100%

Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2025.

Table 1 presents the gender breakdown of the survey of respondents, indicating that 60% are male and 40% are female.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
18-25 Years	52	26
26-35 Years	58	29
40 Years Above	90	45
Total	200	100%

Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2025.

This table shows the age groups of respondents, with the majority being 40 years and above, highlighting the political engagement of older respondents.

Table3: Educational Qualifications of Respondents

S/N	Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC)	10	5
2	SSCE/WAEC/GCE	32	16
3	Diploma/NCE	41	20.5
4	HND/Degree	81	40.5
5	Postgraduate	36	18
Total		200	100%

Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2025.

This table details the educational attainment of respondents, with higher numbers of respondent (40.5%) holding HND/Degree qualifications. Diploma/NCE (20.5%), Postgraduate (18%), SSCE/WAEC/GCE (16%), First school leaving certificate (FSLC) (5%) following respectively. This reveals that all the respondents are lettered and are aware of the political situation of the country.

Table4: Respondents' Sources of Information on Political Situations

S/N	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Newspaper	60	30%
2	Internet/social media	58	29%
3	Radio	12	6%
4	Television	65	32.5%
5	Others	5	2.5%
Total		200	100%

Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2025.

Table 4 categorises the primary sources from which respondents obtain political information, highlighting television (32.5%) as the most frequent source. Followed respectively by newspaper (30%), internet (29%), radio (6%), and other sources (2.5%); this implies that information technology offers Nigerian people access to information; with the influx of social media, the advent of headphones, and personal computers one can easily get information through the internet on what is happening globally while at home or even at any location.

Table 5: Distribution of Factors that Inhibit Women's Political Participation

S/N	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Illiteracy	20	10
2	Patriarchy	26	13
3	Government insensitivity	18	9
4	Lack of adequate information	25	12.5

5	Religion	24	12
6	Culture	23	11.5
7	Early marriage	16	8
8	Zoning	9	4.5
9	Nativity	12	6
10	Sexism	21	10.5
11	Others	6	3
Total		200	100%

Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2025.

Table 5 represents the factors that inhibit women's political participation. The distribution of these factors shows that multiple socio-cultural, educational, and institutional barriers collectively limit women's political participation. The data reveal a complex network of interconnected factors that reinforce each other to sustain low female representation in governance. The table displays the key factors that respondents identified as barriers to women's political participation and performance. The highest-ranking factor is Patriarchy (13%), an entrenched societal structure that limits women's political involvement. Lack of Adequate Information (12.5%) highlights the role of knowledge and media in supporting women's political engagement. Religion (12%), Culture (11.5%), Sexism (10.5%) of total responses still reflects that unfair treatment of people according to their sex is prevalent, other factors that inhibit women's political participation are enumerated with their percentage - Illiteracy (10%), Government insensitivity (9%), Early marriage (8%), Nativity (6%), Zoning (4.5%), and Others (3%): these factors are not mischaracterized rather they make the low representation of the women impregnable. The implication of this is that these factors pose lots of impasses on the political participation of women which reveals that women are still struggling to gain political relevance with the statistics on the table. Addressing these barriers requires approaches that include policy reforms, media engagement, educational programmes, and the dismantling of traditional norms that restrict women's roles in public and political life.

Table 6: Impression of Media Advocacy Coverage on Public Perceptions of Female Politicians

S/N	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Competent	46	23
2	Ambitious	25	12.5%
3	Competitive	35	17.5%
4	Logical	34	17%
5	Passive	15	7.5%
6	Soft	27	13.5%
7	Incompetent	18	9%
Total		200	100%

Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2025.

The survey also explored how much media coverage influences public perceptions of female politicians. 70% of respondents indicated that their views on female political candidates were shaped by advocacy portrayals, with 30% citing negative media representations as a key reason for doubting women's competence in politics. This finding highlights the decisive role of the media in shaping public attitudes and the potentiality of media advocacy to counteract negative stereotypes.

Table 7: Role of Media Advocacy Platforms Consumption towards Public Attitudes

S/N	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Positive framing strategies of female politicians as capable leaders	140	70
2	Negative frames portrayal	60	30
Total		200	100%

Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2025.

The result in table 7 above shows that 70% reported frequent exposure to positive media portrayals of female politicians while 30% were exposed to negative portrayal of women in politics in media. This correlation between media consumption patterns and public attitudes highlights the need for advocacy groups to strategically engage with media outlets with broad reach and the capacity to influence public opinion. It also suggests that more targeted media campaigns, focusing on outlets with a balanced or positive coverage history, could be more effective in shifting public perceptions towards gender parity.

Table 8: Support for Gender Quotas in political offices

S/N	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Support	130	65%
2	Oppose	40	20%
3	Undecided	30	15%
Total		200	100%

Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2025.

This table illustrates the level of support for gender quotas, with the majority of respondents (65%) in favour of these reforms, reflecting a positive shift in public attitudes towards institutional reforms that promote gender equality. However, 20% of respondents opposed such measures, and 15% were undecided. Furthermore, opposition to gender quotas was highest among male respondents from rural areas. Suggesting that support for gender parity measures is not uniformly across demographic groups. The support for gender quotas was also strongly linked to respondents' perceptions of the current political landscape. Respondents who viewed the current underrepresentation of women as a result of systemic discrimination against women were more likely to support quotas. In contrast, those who believed women's low participation was due to a

"lack of interest or entrenched societal norms" were more likely to oppose such measures. This finding indicates that public education and advocacy campaigns need to focus not only on promoting gender equality but also on challenging misconceptions about the causes of women's underrepresentation in politics.

Table 9: Perceptions of Female Politicians' Leadership Styles

S/N	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Bring Unique Perspective to Governance:	140 =	70% =
	Integrity	30	15%
	Empathy	33	16.5%
	Consensus-building capacity	37	18.5%
	Purpose Driven	40	20%
2	Soft:	50 =	25% =
	Weak	15	7.5%
	Emotional	23	11.5%
	Uncompetitive	12	6%
3	Undecided	10	5%
Total		200	100%

Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2019.

Table 9, showing that 70% of respondents believe female politicians bring unique perspectives to governance, emphasising traits such as empathy, integrity, purpose-driven, and consensus-building capacity. However, 25% of respondents believed that female leaders are "too soft" to handle the rigours of political office, and 5% are undecided. This stereotype was more prevalent among male respondents and those less receptive to gender advocacy awareness. These findings suggest that while public perceptions of female politicians gradually improve, traditional gender stereotypes still influence opinions about women's leadership styles. Addressing these stereotypes requires sustained media advocacy efforts that not only highlight the competencies of female politicians but also challenge the normative expectations around "strong" leadership.

Discussion

This study provides valuable insights into public perceptions of female political candidates in Nigeria and the pivotal role of media portrayals in shaping these views. The demographic profile of respondents, predominantly male (60%) and largely aged 40 years and above (45%), reflects a mature and politically engaged population whose perspectives are critical in understanding the socio-political dynamics influencing women's political participation. Alongside a high level of educational attainment (over 40% holding HND/Degree qualifications), suggests that respondents

possess substantial socio-economic and informational resources, positioning them as informed actors in political discourse.

Media consumption patterns reveal that television (32.5%), newspapers (30%), and internet/social media (29%) are the dominant sources of political information. This underscores the coexistence of traditional and digital media platforms in Nigeria's evolving information ecosystem, emphasizing the media's strategic role in framing political narratives and influencing public attitudes towards female politicians.

Exploration of inhibiting factors points to deeply rooted socio-cultural and institutional barriers, with patriarchy (13%), lack of adequate information (12.5%), religion (12%), culture (11.5%), and sexism (10.5%) dominating respondents' concerns. This constellation of factors reveals the complex interplay of societal norms and institutional shortcomings that collectively hinder women's political engagement. Such entrenched barriers call for comprehensive policy reforms and cultural shifts to facilitate greater inclusion of women in governance.

Support for gender quotas emerges strongly in this study, with 65% of respondents endorsing such institutional reforms as a pathway to enhancing women's political representation. Opposition (20%) and indecision (15%), particularly among male respondents and those in rural areas, reflect ongoing resistance and uneven acceptance of gender equity measures. The correlation between support for quotas and recognition of systemic discrimination against women underscores the importance of public education campaigns that address misconceptions regarding women's underrepresentation.

Finally, perceptions of female leadership styles reveal a nuanced landscape; while 70% of respondents attribute positive leadership qualities to female politicians including empathy, integrity, and consensus-building. 25% perceive women as "soft" and emotionally less suited for political office. This dichotomy reflects enduring gender stereotypes linking effective leadership to traditionally masculine traits. These perceptions are more prevalent among male respondents and those less engaged with gender advocacy, highlighting the need for ongoing media and advocacy efforts to redefine leadership norms in more inclusive and equitable terms.

Conclusion

The results emphasise a positive curve in public perceptions of female politicians in Nigeria, seriously mediated by media representations and shaped by complex socio-cultural barriers. While progress is evident in recognition of women's competence and support for institutional reforms like gender quotas, persistent stereotypes and structural obstacles continue to limit women's political participation. These results affirm the critical role of media advocacy as both a catalyst for change and a field for contesting gendered political narratives. It explains that media visibility of women candidates' links advocacy emphasis to public political awareness. Consequently, an inclusive strategy encompassing media reform, public education, policy innovation, and cultural transformation is crucial to dismantle barriers and foster substantive gender equality in Nigerian politics.

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