


## Chapter 8

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# Women's Perceptions of the Political Candidacy of Females in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Despite the advocacy for the increased representation of women which has been ongoing for more than two decades in Nigeria, the statistics of women in governance has not been impressive. After the 2023 elections in the country, three women emerged as senators and 14 were elected to the House of Representatives, putting women's representation in the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly at 3.62%. No woman won a gubernatorial seat. Admittedly, the meagre figures of women's representation in government are not unconnected to the insignificant number of female candidates fielded for the elections. However, with more women than men having their Permanent Voters Cards prior to the elections, the assumption would be that they would use their numerical strength to vote the fielded women candidates into office. In this study, a mixed methods approach was adopted to assess how women in Nigeria evaluate the political candidacy of females, relative to that of men. Findings reveal a bias against women candidates, even by women. The implication of this is that gender considerations affect the selection and voting of candidates into political offices. This reflects the subtle biases that go into the selection of women candidates by political parties and other democratic institutions. In addition to the several efforts to close gender gaps in political spaces and harness the potentials of women in governance, this study is insightful because it draws attention to the traditional gender socialisation process, and what needs to be done to influence greater representation of women.

**Keywords:** Elections, Gender Socialisation, Nigeria, Political Candidates, Women's Representation

## Introduction

An important index for the evaluation of democratic practice is the extent to which men and women participate and are represented in the political system. In Nigeria, the return to democratic rule in 1999 ushered in great hopes that all citizens – men and women – would be eligible to seek political offices. Despite the heightened hopes for twenty-four years, women have remained under-represented in the political sphere in the country. Their unbalanced access in comparison with their male counterparts has been a source of concern, leading to clamour for greater women's representation. Although increased participation and representation of women in politics have been regarded as catalysts for democracy, sustainable development, peace, equality influencing public perception of women's political participation and breaking gender stereotypes (Fayomi et al., 2022; Ogbogu, 2012; Ojo, 2022; Okedele, 2020), women continue to experience significant challenges.

Available statistics on the representation of women in parliament in Nigeria from 1999 show that in the House of Representatives, women have only occupied between 3.4% and 7% of the seats and between 2.8% to 8.3% of the seats in the Senate (IPU, 2018; 2020). In the 2023 elections, only three women won Senatorial seats and 14 in the House of Representatives, putting women's representation in the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly at 3.62%, which is far below the global average of 26.5% (IPU, 2023). The figures of women's representation in the legislature in Nigeria is one of the lowest in the world. The only female presidential candidate in the 2023 elections, Chichi Ojei, contested on the party platform of the Allied Peoples' Movement (APM) but was only able to garner about 10% of the overall votes. History would have been made if Aishat Dahiru *Binani* emerged as governor as initially declared by Hudu Ari, the Resident Electoral Commissioner of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), in Adamawa State. Controversy, however, trailed the announcement, which was nullified and declared illegal, with the incumbent Ahmadu Fintiri declared as governor, thereby terminating Dahiru's emergence as the first elected female governor in the country.

Over time, different measures to enhance women's political participation and close the gender gaps have been put in place, but they have not yielded the desired results. There are continuous advocacy efforts to open up decision-making positions for women in Nigeria, especially through political parties, recruiting and fielding them for office, so as to stimulate gender inclusiveness. A substantial body of research documents that political parties as gatekeepers to power continue to select and support few women candidates for decision-making positions in Nigeria (Pogoso, 2012; Nwabunkeonye, 2014; Abba & Babalola, 2017; Ugwu & Okoye, 2022; Oshewolo & Adedire, 2019; Omenma et al., 2016; Ngara & Ayabam, 2013).

The male dominance of party structures undoubtedly depicts a bias for female candidates, and this is not unconnected to the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society. Bearing in mind women's numerical strength, which is almost on a par with that of men, in a society that ascribes leadership to men, it is important to understand what women think of politics and their perceptions about females seeking political leadership positions. This chapter therefore investigates women's attitudes and interests in politics, their voting preferences, and perceptions of female political candidates in Nigeria, especially as it has to do with the 2023 general elections.

### **Brief literature review**

Evidence from the literature draws attention to the existence of gender gaps in political ambition, and as a result, women are less likely than men to be interested in politics or seek political office (Fox & Lawless, 2014; Pate & Fox, 2018; Fraile & Sánchez-Vitores, 2020). Scholarship on political ambition has shown that women are not as ambitious as men, hence, they are less likely to aspire for political office. Reasons for the gender gap in political ambition include disparities in the way that from childhood, women and men are traditionally socialised, where the former tilts towards the private domain and the latter towards the public domain, the slimmer chances of women being encouraged to contest elections than men, greater costs of career advancements for women which may dissuade them from political contests, and the tendencies that women have to doubt their qualification for office than men (McAllister, 2018; Bauer & Darkwah, 2020a; Fox & Lawless, 2004).

Additionally, studies have shown that women are less favourably disposed to competition than men (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007; Preece & Stoddard, 2015; Fox & Pate, 2023). Hence, the competitive nature of politics from the pre-election to post-election periods, at inter- and intra-party levels discourages women, unlike men, who are less averse to it. Voting is a significant part of political participation, as it is a legitimate means of choosing representatives in a democracy, thereby allowing citizens to have a voice. To be eligible to vote, registration takes place before the elections. Evidence has shown that in some countries, there have been instances where more women than men registered as voters for elections (Webster, 2000; File & Crissey, 2012). Research conducted on voting patterns reveals that gender gaps exist between women and men. Although most studies agree that because men are more interested in politics, their voting turnout is higher than that of women (Solijonov, 2016; Dassonneville & Kostelka, 2021; Stockemer & Sundstrom, 2021) data from some countries have shown instances where more women voted than men (Reingold & Harell, 2010; MacManus, 2018). Some studies have even shown that the gender gap in

voters' turnout is gradually closing (Córdova & Rangel, 2017). In countries where the turnout of female voters is lower, electoral violence, political apathy, belief of their votes not counting, doubts about the credibility of the elections, dissatisfaction with the political system and lack of spousal support are some of the factors that account for it (Alacevich & Zejcirovic, 2020; Ojo, 2022; Cheema et al., 2023). Low turnout of women voters has an impact on political engagement and undermines prospects for gender equality. Scholarship on candidate preference has shown that people vote either on the basis of gender affinity or party support.

In a US study, Badas and Stauffer (2019) averred that during elections, people are likely to vote along party lines, rather than on the basis of the candidate's gender. Research has also shown the likelihood of women jettisoning party support for gender affinity, and voting for female political aspirants (McDermott, 1998; Ladam et al., 2018). However, the chances of women voting for female candidates are higher in contexts where many women are fielded (Marien et al., 2017). Drawing from existing literature, there are cases where women choose not to vote for female candidates. For instance, studies have shown that at times, women do not vote for female candidates for a variety of reasons including a lack of confidence in their leadership skills, the belief that politics is a male domain that women should avoid, preference for a particular class of women candidates, personal biases, amongst others (Nwabunkeonye, 2014; Ngagara & Ayabam, 2013). To a large extent, how women evaluate female candidates determines the support that they give them, or otherwise.

## **Theoretical framework**

This chapter is premised on the gendered political socialisation theoretical framework. The nexus between gender socialisation and political socialisation as theorised by Bos et al. (2022) is referred to as gendered political socialisation. This theoretical framework gives insights on how people view gender in politics and how these views influence their political interests and ambitions which are often imbibed from childhood. Although they may change over time, the formation of ideas, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes and perceptions about politics and political leadership starts at childhood (Reifen-Tagar & Cimpian, 2022; Dawson & Prewitt, 1969).

Development of political values, beliefs, knowledge, ideas and behaviour are often through agents of socialisation. Traditionally, agents of socialisation include the family, the school, the peer group and the media. These four agents are significant forces in the political socialisation process. Given that the family is the first major contact that most people have with

the world, the behaviour; including the political, is shaped first from the family. When a person receives a formal education, especially in a school, the exposition to certain values about politics through the learning of subjects like civic education, history and government, is inevitable. Through social interactions with people of same or close age brackets, peer groups are formed. In the course of interaction with peer groups, people become politically socialised, and they form ideas and develop behaviours, inherent amongst those whom they interact with. The print and electronic media are other potent agents of political socialisation. Political issues are discussed in newspapers, magazines, on television and on radio, and these significantly influence the views of people. In recent years, the social media has become a powerful tool that shapes the values, beliefs and attitudes of people on politics. In the Nigerian context, evidence from existing literature is replete with the impact of political socialisation on political participation (Sule et al., 2017; Olasupo, 2015; Asadu & Nwobi, 2018; Othman et al., 2018; Oladejo & Oni, 2017; Mustapha & Omar, 2020; Owoeye, 2021). The gender socialisation process to a large extent influences what is deemed as suitable traits for males and females, and it has effects on how people are politically socialised. It is the process through which males and females internalise values, beliefs and attitudes that shape their behaviour. Through gender socialisation, roles and expectations that are gender-specific are created and maintained. The effect of the gendered political socialisation process on girls is that they show a lesser interest and ambition in politics than boys, and as they grow older, the gap widens (Bos et al., 2022).

### **Women's political candidacy in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria**

For the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, evidence from the Independent National Electoral Commission's website shows that 18 political parties nominated candidates for political offices (INEC, 2022). These political offices include one seat each for the presidential and vice-presidential constituencies, 109 senatorial districts and 360 federal constituencies. Table 17 gives a breakdown of the figures of male and female candidates for the various political offices.

**Table 17:** Candidates for Political Offices in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

Office	No. of Seats	No. of Candidates	No. of Males	No. of Females
President	1	18	17	1
Vice-President	1	18	18	0
Gubernatorial	28	419	394	25
Senate	109	1,101	1,009	92
House of Representatives	360	3,122	2,832	288

Source: INEC (2022); European Union Election Observation Mission (2023)

Only one of the 18 candidates who vied for the presidential seat was a woman; the same applied for the vice presidency. The number of female candidates for the Senate and House of Representatives was also meagre when compared with those of male candidates. In the gubernatorial race, the election took place in 28 out of 36 states in Nigeria. In these states, only 25 were women out of the 419 gubernatorial aspirants, representing just about 6%. These figures of women’s representation are alarmingly low and one of the lowest across the globe. Although 44.4 million out of 93.5 million voters in the 2023 elections were women, as declared by the INEC, Thomas-Odia (2023) observes that female candidates fielded by political parties constituted only 10.1%. Since Nigeria returned to democratic governance 24 years ago, no woman has emerged as President, Vice President or Governor in any of the elections held so far.

The under-representation of women in political offices is not unconnected with the subtle biases that go into the selection of female candidates by political parties and other democratic institutions. Despite the country’s international commitments to eradicate discrimination against women, the internal mechanisms of political parties disempower the political candidacy of females. An examination of the constitutions of the three major political parties; the All Progressives Congress (APC) which is the ruling party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), which is the leading opposition party and the Labour Party (LP), which became popular towards the 2023 elections show that strategic offices were not assigned to women. Women were assigned ‘woman leader’ positions in the National Executive, National Working, Zonal Executive, State Executive, State Working, Senatorial District, Local Government Area Executive, Ward Executive and Polling Unit Committees, as well as Local Government Area / Area Council and State caucuses of the political parties (APC, 2019; PDP, 2019; LP, 2022a) The distinguishing factor between the LP and the two other parties, besides

the Woman Leader position, is that its constitution stipulates the creation of offices for six deputy national women leaders representing each of the geo-political zones in Nigeria in the National Executive Council and National Working Committee (LP, 2022a). It also provides for offices of three deputy state women leaders in the State Executive and State Working Committees. In addition, out of the four positions for a vice chairman in the Local Government Area Executive Council and its Working Committee, one must be a female. At the Ward Executive Council, of the two vice chairmen, one is expected to be a female. It is, however, important to mention that despite the offices created, the woman leader position is not strategic as it does not significantly increase the engagement of women as leaders in political decision-making positions in Nigeria. The growing recognition of the need for internal reforms for the promotion of gender equality between men and women within the party structure of the APC necessitated amendments to the party's constitution. The amended constitution recommended a women's wing, the inclusion of a deputy national woman leader in its National Working Committee and a gender and affirmative action clause (APC, 2022). Only two women are members of the National Working Committee for the APC and the LP, while for the PDP, only the woman leader is a member (Akpan, 2022; Banjo, 2021; LP, 2022b). These are clear pointers that these parties still have a long way to go in ensuring gender parity as offices assigned to women are mere tokenism.

Besides the issue of allocating quotas for women in party constitutions, another important factor for women's political engagement is the availability of financial resources. Scholars have asserted that being a woman and not having access to adequate financial resources jeopardises a woman's chances of political recruitment (Bauer & Darkwah, 2020b). Financial resources are necessary for funding political campaigns; hence, the high costs associated with them limit women.

Table 18 shows the cost of nomination forms for various political offices. Although the cost of the forms was on the high side, female aspirants on the platform of the APC were exempt from payment while those contesting on the platform of the PDP received a 50% reduction in cost (Itodo, 2022; Iniobong, 2022). This exemption did not transcend into any meaningful increase in the number of female contestants as Iniobong added that the APC had 103 female candidates while the PDP had 72 female candidates. The low statistics of women political contestants is not unconnected to the high cost of running for political office.

**Table 18:** Cost of Nomination Forms by Major Political Parties in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

Party	Presidential Aspirants	Governorship Aspirants	Senatorial Aspirants	House of Representative Aspirants	State House of Assembly Aspirants
APC	N100 million	N50 million	N20 million	N10 million	N2 million
PDP	N40 million	N21 million	N3.5 million	N2.5 million	N600,000
LP	N/A	N15 million	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: Compiled from Bakare (2022); Ufuoma (2022); Akubo (2023)

Beyond the procurement of nomination forms, other factors that limited the political candidacy of women in Nigeria in the 2023 general elections, just like the previous ones, include: the outrageous costs of political campaigns that come with competing in elections, which many women cannot afford; sexual assault; gender-related electoral violence; competing demands on the use of time between the domestic and public spaces; late night political meetings; discriminatory religious and cultural norms; gender stereotypes that ascribe leadership to men; cases of women who married outside their places of birth being considered as non-indigenes and not qualified to run for political office, amongst others (Anya, 2003; Arowolo & Aluko, 2010; Nwauzor, 2016; Osori, 2017; Olayinka, 2021).

From the foregoing, the insignificant number of female political candidates which resulted in a meagre women’s representation in the 2023 elections is a growing concern; hence, subsequent sections of the chapter focus on interests of women in Nigeria in politics and how they evaluate the political candidacy of females, relative to that of men.

## Research methodology

### Methods

To assess how women in Nigeria evaluate the political candidacy of females, relative to that of men, data was obtained using a mixed methods approach. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed. The quantitative research method used was an online survey. The online survey was completed by 194 women residing in Abuja and across 15 other states in Nigeria. The survey was in three parts. The first part was designed to elicit data on the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. The second part obtained data on the voting attitudes, preferences of respondents and issues surrounding women’s political candidacy during the 2023 general

elections in Nigeria, while the third part had closed-ended questions on their interest in politics. The online link to access the survey was shared on social media platforms, especially through WhatsApp and Telegram. The data obtained from the online survey is presented in clustered bar charts for simplicity and easy comprehension.

Qualitative data was obtained through the use of a focus group discussion (FGD) with nine women. The discussion was held on Zoom for convenience, given that the participants reside in different locations in Ogun, Kwara, Cross River, Adamawa, Kaduna and Enugu states. The participants who were purposively selected are women with a minimum of a Master's degree, in order to gain insights into their thoughts on the political candidacy of women in Nigeria. Data obtained from the FGD was transcribed and analysed into relevant themes for the study, in addition to using verbatim quotes for explanations to corroborate the data from the online survey, where necessary.

## Results

### **Socio-demographic characteristics of online survey respondents**

As shown in Table 19, 44.8% of the respondents are aged between 18 and 30, 44.3% are between ages 31 and 50, 8.8% are aged between 50 and 70, and 2.1% are 70 years old and above. The educational qualifications of the respondents differ. Respondents who possess either of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) or the Ordinary Level (O level) certificates were 15 (7.7%), 26 (13.4%) of them have any of NCE / OND / HND certificates, 79 (40.8%) of them have Bachelor's degree, 26 (13.4%) have a Ph.D. and eight (4.1%) of them have other qualifications.

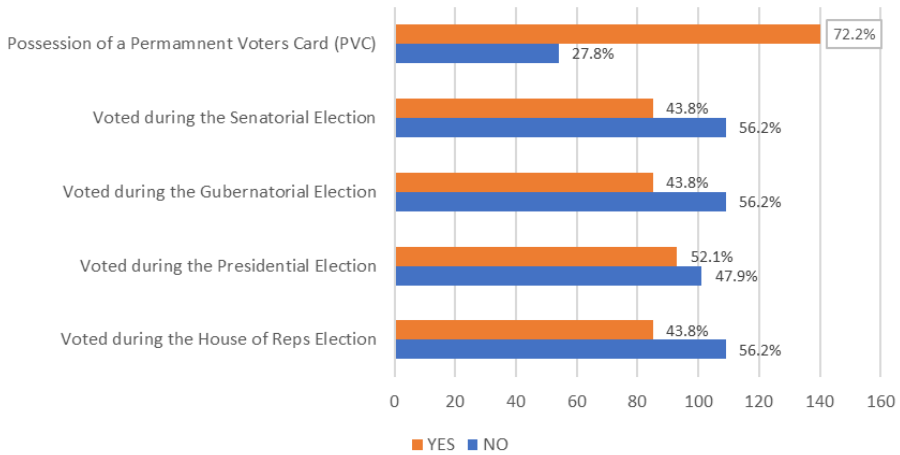
From Table 19, the 194 respondents of the online survey cut across states including Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Osun, Rivers, Kaduna, Cross River, Benue, Ekiti, Kwara, Imo, Nasarawa, Kogi, Ebonyi and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The majority of the respondents are from Ogun state, while the lowest number of respondents are from Kaduna, Benue, Nasarawa, Kogi and Ebonyi states.

**Table 19:** Socio-demographic Characteristics of Online Survey Respondents

Characteristics	Respondents	Percentage
AGE		
18-30	87	44.8
31-50	86	44.3
50-70	17	8.8
70 and above	4	2.1
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL		
SSCE / O Level	15	7.7
NCE / OND / HND	26	13.4
B.Sc / B.Ed	79	40.8
M.Sc / M. Ed	40	20.6
Ph.D.	26	13.4
Other	8	4.1
STATE OF RESIDENCE		
Ogun	83	42.8
Ondo	2	1
Oyo	13	6.7
Osun	2	1
Rivers	2	1
Kaduna	1	0.5
Cross River	2	1
Benue	1	0.5
Ekiti	4	2.1
Kwara	4	2.1
Imo	2	1
Lagos	68	35.1
Nasarawa	1	0.5
Kogi	1	0.5
Ebonyi	1	0.5
FCT	7	3.7

Source: Researchers' own

### Voting Attitude of Women

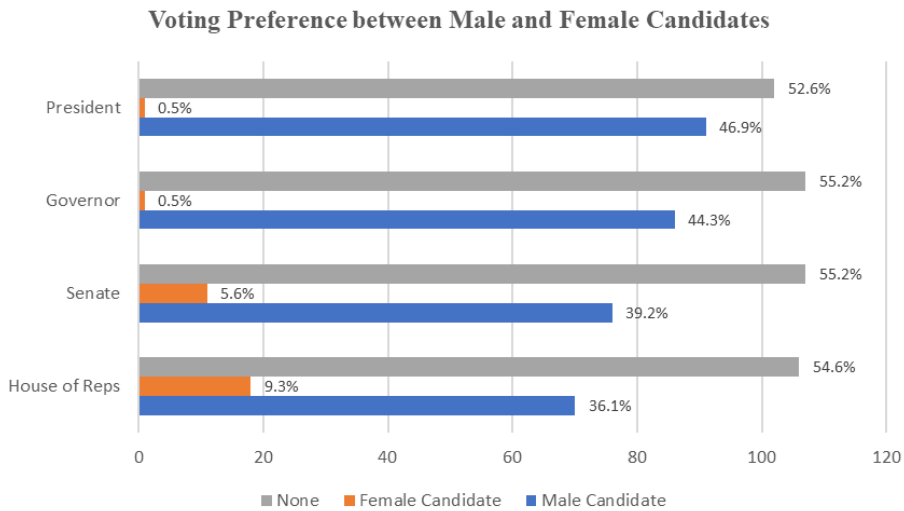


**Figure 2:** Voting Attitude of Women in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

Source: Researchers' own

Figure 2 shows the voting attitude of women in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. While 140 (72.2%) of the women have PVCs (permanent voter cards), 54 (27.8%) do not have. Out of the 140 women who have PVCs, 85 (43.7%) admitted to casting votes for senatorial, gubernatorial and house of representatives' candidates, while 109 (56.2%) did not vote. For the presidential elections, 93 (47.9%) women voted, while 101 (52.1%) did not vote. The implication of these statistics is that although 72% of the respondents had PVCs which made them eligible to vote, the majority of them did not vote during the 2023 general elections. The highest turnout of the respondents was during the presidential election.

During the focus group discussion, although the nine discussants said that they all had their PVCs, only four of them voted for the various offices during the 2023 elections. The reasons given by the five who did not vote included the belief that ultimately their votes would not count, the fear of electoral violence, the use of the voting period for domestic work and rest, and disinterest in voting.



**Figure 3:** Voting Preference between Male and Female Candidates in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

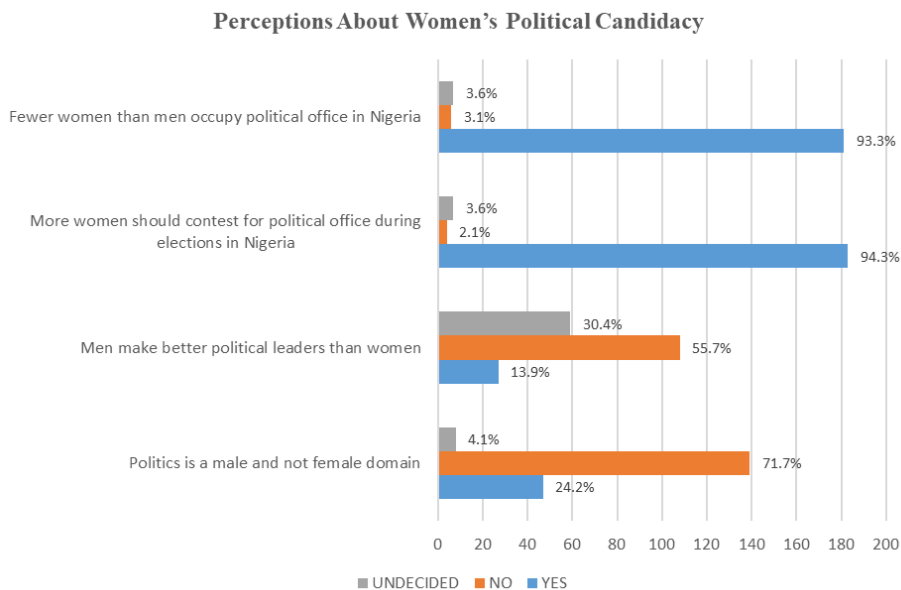
Source: Researchers' own

Figure 3 presents the statistics of the voting preference of the respondents, differentiated between male and female candidates in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Data from the online survey shows that 91 respondents (46.9%) voted for a male presidential candidate, while 1(0.5%) voted for a female presidential candidate; 86 (44.3%) voted for a male gubernatorial candidate, while only 1 (0.5%) voted for a female gubernatorial candidate; 76 (39.2%) voted for male senatorial candidates, while 11 (5.6%) voted for female senatorial candidates: and 70 (36.1%) voted for male house of representatives candidates, while 18 (9.3%) voted for female house of representatives candidates. From the survey, the majority of the respondents did not vote for either male or female candidates in the 2023 general elections and this is not unconnected to the statistics shown in Figure 2, which shows that despite having their PVCs, most of the respondents did not vote. For those who voted, most of the responses, as shown in Figure 3 reveal that they voted more for male political candidates across the various offices, than they did for female political candidates. It was discovered during the focus group discussion that four discussants admitted that they cast their votes for male political candidates. As to why they voted for male and not female political aspirants, they gave reasons including not knowing the female political candidates seeking presidential and gubernatorial offices and that the few women contestants who they knew, were fielded by minority political parties.

Speaking on women being fielded by minority political parties, one of the discussants stated that:

*“Not many women contested, so I had no option than to cast my votes for male candidates. The few women that I saw their campaign posters and perhaps I would have voted for were candidates of the unknown parties that I was sure stood no chance of winning. So, instead of wasting my votes, I voted for male candidates of a major political party”.*

Another reason given for voting for male instead of female aspirants, as stated by one of the respondents, was that she considered some of the women incapable enough for the positions that they were seeking. After probing to know what she meant, she explained that the few women who contested were new faces with no political experience, unlike most of the men who had been in politics at some point in time or the other and were already ‘familiar faces’.



**Figure 4:** Perceptions about Women’s Political Candidacy

Source: Researchers’ own

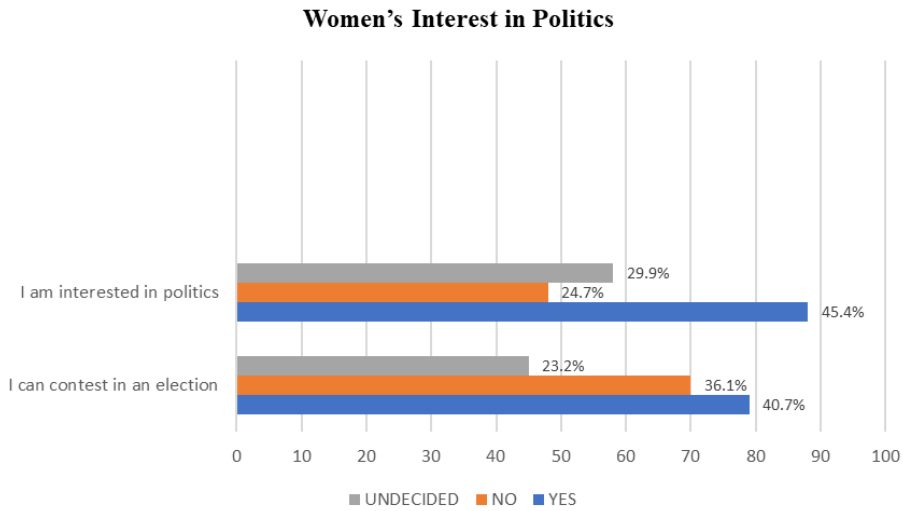
As shown in Figure 4, while 6 (3.1%) and 7 (3.6%) did not agree and were undecided respectively, the majority of the respondents; that is, 181 (93.3%) agreed that there are fewer women than men occupying political offices in Nigeria. While 183 (94.3%) of the respondents admitted that more women should be allowed to contest elections in Nigeria, 4 (2.1%) were of the

opinion that more women should not be allowed, and 7 (3.6%) of them were undecided. On the notion of men making better political leaders than women, while 108 (55.7%) of the respondents disagreed with the assertion, 27 (13.9%) agreed that men make better political leaders than women, and 59 (30.4%) were undecided. Statistics from Figure 4 also indicate that 47 (24.2%) of the respondents opined that politics is a male and not female domain; 139 (71.7%) of the respondents did not subscribe to this opinion, while 8 (4.1%) were undecided.

All nine respondents in the focus group discussion agreed that the figures of women in political office in Nigeria were meagre in comparison to those of men, in addition to alluding that more women should vie for elections. They all, however, disagreed with the notion that men make better political leaders than women and they also disputed politics as being an exclusive domain for men. When asked why they think that there are fewer women than men in government in Nigeria, they identified factors including the high cost of nomination forms by political parties, the dominance of patriarchal values that assign leadership to men, the belief that politics is a dirty game that women will not want to become involved with, late night political meetings that women cannot attend, societal biases against women political candidates, the competitive nature of politics and lack of family support for women to contest elections. When the respondents were asked to shed light on why they do not think that men make better political leaders than women, one of them said:

*“Women have the ability to lead just as men can. However, if you look at our society, so many things are limiting women. Look at the family setting for example, see the way women manage the home. I believe that a woman that can manage affairs at the home front, with support and a good political atmosphere can manage a political constituency. Instead of saying men make better political leaders, I feel that it’s better to say both genders have skills for political leadership. The problem is that many factors limit women’s political leadership, unlike that of men. Also related to it is the belief by most people in our society that politics is a male and not a female domain. That’s not true! Politics can be played by women and men, just that there are more men than women in politics in Nigeria.”*

Another discussant added that the reason why some people believe that men make better political leaders than women is because of the limited number of women who seek elective offices. She added that this belief is not likely to change significantly until gender parity is achieved in political office in Nigeria.



**Figure 5:** Interest in Politics

*Source: Researchers' own*

As depicted in Figure 5, 88 (45.4%) of the respondents are interested in politics, 48 (24.7%) are not interested, while 58 (29.9%) are undecided. While 79 (40.7%) of the respondents indicated that they can contest in elections, 70 (36.1%) specified that they cannot, and 45 (23.2%) were undecided. The online survey had an open-ended question that probed why respondents could not contest in elections. Data from the focus group discussion showed that the participants were all interested in politics, although with varying degrees of interest which spanned across engagement in political discussions, listening to news on political issues, attending political rallies and meetings, campaigning for their preferred political candidates and voting in elections. Only one of the discussants, however, stated that she could contest in an election, while the other eight said that they could not. Reasons given by respondents from the online survey and focus group discussion for their unwillingness to contest elections in Nigeria included disinterest, self-doubt, the belief that their efforts would be futile as a result of discrimination against female political contestants, political corruption, the severities of political contests in the country, the notion that their chances of being picked as candidates by political parties is slimmer in comparison to those of men, fear of being victims of electoral violence, competing family and professional obligations that would not give them time to run for political office, fear of not receiving sufficient support, the existence of political caucuses that they do not belong to and fear of losing and wasting money for political campaigns.

## **Discussion of findings**

### **Voting attitude**

Data from the study showed that despite about 72% of the respondents having their PVCs, which was a mode of identification to participate in the elections, the majority of them did not vote during the 2023 general elections. The highest turnout was during the presidential elections and just about 48% of the respondents voted. These statistics are in consonance with the findings of previous studies (Dassonneville & Kostelka, 2021; Stockemer & Sundstrom, 2021) that show that in some countries, the turnout of female voters is lower than that of men.

### **Candidate preference**

For the presidential, gubernatorial and legislative offices, the majority of the respondents who voted in this study cast their votes for male candidates. The lowest preference for female candidates was expressed at the Presidential and Governorship positions. However, this may be as a result of the meagre figures of female candidates for both offices. About 6% of the votes of the respondents went to female candidates for Senatorial positions and 9% for the House of Representatives. The highest preference for female candidates was expressed for the House of Representatives positions and this is not unconnected with the fact that there were 288 women contestants for the office, unlike other positions that had lesser numbers of females. An explanation for this can be drawn from Marien et al.'s (2017) study that posited that the chances of placing more women into political office increases when there are more female contestants. As to why some of the respondents did not vote for female candidates, the reasons they gave are in agreement with studies carried out by Badas and Stauffer (2019), Nwabunkeonye (2014), and Ngra and Ayabam (2013).

### **Perceptions about women's political candidacy**

From the study, over 90% of the respondents agreed that fewer women than men in Nigeria occupy political offices (some of the factors responsible for this are discussed by Okedele, 2020; Nwauzor, 2016; Osori, 2017; Olayinka, 2021) and that more women should contest elections to attain these positions. About 56% of the respondents disagreed with the notion that men make better political leaders than women do. In addition, while about 24% of the respondents think that politics is a male domain, 72% of the respondents do not subscribe to this. The implication of these findings is that women know that just like their male counterparts, females have the skills for leadership

and that their under-representation in political spaces is a democratic deficit that needs to be addressed. However, concrete steps towards the actualisation of gender parity in politics, such as greater participation, that one would expect that women will take are not being pursued, as evidenced by the data for this study.

### **Interest in politics**

To gauge the respondents' interest in politics, this study found out that 45% of the respondents stated that they were interested in politics, while the remaining 55% were either not interested or undecided. In response to the question on whether they could vie for political office, while 41% of the respondents answered in the affirmative, the remaining 59% were either undecided or not interested. A close examination of the statistics shows that a large number of women in Nigeria are not interested in politics as a result of a number of reasons explained in the existing scholarship (Alacevich & Zejcirovic, 2020; Ojo, 2022; Cheema et al., 2023). In essence, these statistics are a pointer that the majority of the respondents are not politically ambitious.

### **Conclusion**

The under-representation of women in political offices has links with the male dominance of party structures and paltry figures of female candidates fielded. Moreover, the disinterest of the majority of women in politics and their unwillingness to undergo the rigours of political contest will continue to widen the gender gap in politics. To a large extent, these are as a result of the traditional gender socialisation process which influences perceptions about the eligibility of candidates. Although the advocacy for greater participation of women has heightened over the years, the socialisation process that assigns the private sphere to women and the public sphere to men still subtly upholds gender inequality. Biases on the grounds of gender differences go into candidates' selection for parties and voting by the populace. Even women have unconsciously internalised these prejudices, doubting their own abilities and qualifications to vie for political office and not giving the expected level of support to other women who seek political office. It therefore becomes very important to challenge the traditional gender socialisation process that ascribes different roles to men and women by engaging in continuous advocacy for a just political landscape that allows for the recruitment of more women. Arrogating traits like leadership, bravery, courage and strength solely with masculinity should be discouraged. Vigorous campaigns to dispel the negative stereotypes surrounding women's political leadership should be accentuated, especially through the use of the media and in schools, even

as they permeate into the family and amongst peer groups. Since most of the ideas, beliefs and perceptions about politics are formed from childhood, it is important to design the school curriculum from the nursery level to focus on topics including gender equality, leadership, political participation of men and women, amongst others. It is also important that women encourage men to join in the campaign for encouraging more women candidates to run for office. Efforts geared towards encouraging more women to run for office will influence perceptions about female candidates and increase their chances of electoral success, whilst ultimately allowing them to use their views, experiences and potentials to influence greater representation of women.

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