

Chapter 12

Women's Experiences in Nigeria's Elections: Challenges, Opportunities, and Implications for Gender Equity and Democracy

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Abstract

Despite Nigeria's progress in promoting gender equality and women's rights, women continue to face significant challenges when participating in the electoral process. This study aims to examine the experiences of women candidates and voters in Nigeria's electoral process, focusing on the challenges that they face, the opportunities available to them, and the implications of their participation for gender equity and democratic governance. Using a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and in-depth interviews, the study will explore the extent to which women are represented in electoral contests and the factors that hinder or facilitate their participation. The study will also examine the experiences of women voters, including their attitudes towards women candidates, their motivations for voting, and the barriers that they face in accessing polling stations. Preliminary findings suggest that despite legal and constitutional provisions that promote women's participation in politics, women in Nigeria face significant barriers to entry and participation in the electoral process. These barriers include cultural and traditional attitudes towards women in politics, limited financial resources, and insufficient support from political parties

and institutions. The study will contribute to the growing body of literature on women's political participation in Nigeria, highlighting the need for more targeted interventions to increase women's representation in politics and improve the overall quality of democratic governance in the country. The study's findings will be of interest to policymakers, civil society, and researchers working on issues of gender equity and democratic governance in Nigeria and beyond.

Keywords: Electoral Process, Gender Equity, Nigeria, Women Candidates, Women Voters

Introduction

Nigeria, as one of the largest democracies in Africa, plays a crucial role in shaping the continent's political landscape (Eghosa, 2018). However, despite its democratic strides, the country still faces challenges in achieving gender equity and inclusive governance. The representation and participation of women as candidates and voters in Nigeria's electoral process have been areas of concern, raising questions about the effectiveness of gender equality measures and democratic governance (Duru, 2020).

Women's participation as candidates and voters in Nigerian elections has long been a topic of interest for researchers, scholars, and policymakers. Previous studies have revealed significant gender disparities and challenges faced by women in the electoral process (Akande & Okoro, 2017). These disparities stem from deeply entrenched societal norms, cultural biases, and structural barriers that limit women's access to political power and decision-making. As a result, women are under-represented in political offices and face significant obstacles when engaging in the electoral process (Duru, 2020).

Research conducted in Nigeria has highlighted several key challenges faced by women candidates. These challenges include limited access to financial resources, lack of support from political parties, cultural stereotypes, and violence and intimidation during campaigns (Amuwo, 2014). The research has also documented the experiences of women voters, shedding light on issues such as voter suppression, limited awareness of political rights, and social pressures that influence their voting choices (Ogunbodede, 2019).

The Nigerian government, civil society organisations, and international partners have recognised the need to address these challenges and promote gender equity in the electoral process. Various policies and initiatives have been implemented to enhance women's political participation. For example, the National Gender Policy in Nigeria provides a framework for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment across various sectors,

including politics (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2006). Additionally, organisations such as the Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA) and Women in Politics Forum (WIPF) have been actively advocating for women's political rights and supporting women candidates (WRAPA, 2021; WIPF, n.d.).

Despite these efforts, achieving gender equity in Nigeria's electoral process remains a significant challenge. Women continue to face barriers that limit their participation and representation in political offices. This chapter seeks to delve deeper into the experiences of women candidates and voters in the Nigerian electoral process to understand the underlying factors contributing to these challenges. By examining these experiences, the chapter aims to identify opportunities for enhancing gender equity, strengthening democratic governance, and promoting inclusive political participation. It does this by examining the experiences of women candidates and voters in Nigeria's electoral process. The objectives of the chapter are:

1. To examine the experiences of women candidates in Nigeria's electoral process.
2. To explore the experiences of women voters in Nigerian elections.
3. To identify the challenges and barriers faced by women candidates and voters.
4. To assess the opportunities and strategies for enhancing gender equity in the electoral process.
5. To analyse the implications of women's participation for democratic governance in Nigeria.

The significance of this chapter cannot be overstated. As Amzat and Dahiru (2020) argue, understanding the barriers faced by women candidates and voters is essential for designing effective strategies and policies to address these challenges. Mbeki (2019) similarly argues that promoting gender equity in the electoral process not only ensures the representation of diverse voices but also contributes to the overall development and democratic governance of Nigeria. By examining the experiences of women in the electoral process, this chapter will provide valuable insights and recommendations to inform policymakers, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders working towards gender equality and inclusive democracy.

Nigeria's electoral process is marked by gender disparities and challenges that hinder women's participation as candidates and voters. This essay has provided an overview of the background and context of the study, highlighting existing literature and research on women's experiences in Nigerian elections. It has discussed the gender disparities, challenges faced by women, and relevant policies and initiatives aimed at promoting gender

equity and democratic governance. By examining the experiences of women candidates and voters, this study aims to contribute.

The researcher used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative in-depth interviews, to gather data from women voters and candidates. Surveys provided statistical data on the experiences of a large number of women voters, while in-depth interviews will offer detailed narratives from a smaller number of women candidates. A stratified random sampling strategy ensured diversity in the sample, considering factors like age, education, and income level. Surveys were conducted online, while in-person interviews allowed for more in-depth exploration of experiences. This approach aimed to provide comprehensive insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by women in Nigeria's electoral process. The researcher used statistical analysis to analyse the quantitative data from the surveys. They used thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative data from the in-depth interviews.

Methodology

This research employed a distinct methodology to examine the experiences of women candidates and voters in Nigeria's electoral process, exploring the challenges, opportunities, and implications for gender equity and democratic governance.

The study utilised an online survey distributed via email and social media platforms, allowing for diverse participation across the country. The respondents were self-selected. This means that anyone who was interested in participating in the study and had access to the Internet could complete the survey.

The research analysed both quantitative data obtained from 200 questionnaire respondents and qualitative insights gathered through interviews. The respondents in the study are the voices of women in Nigeria's electoral process. They are the women who have run for office, the women who have voted, and the women who have witnessed the challenges and opportunities that women face in participating in democracy.

The distribution of respondents by type of election or year contested is not specified, but this only serves to highlight the breadth of women's experiences. Whether they have been candidates, voters, or observers, these women have a unique perspective to offer on the state of gender equity in Nigerian elections.

The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics to gain an understanding of women's participation in the electoral process,

including their voter turnout rates, candidacy rates, and elected positions. The qualitative data from the interviews was analysed using a narrative approach to identify common themes and experiences amongst women candidates and voters such as interviews with them. It can be used to understand the individual experiences of women and to identify common themes and challenges.

The distinct methodology of this research allowed for the collection and analysis of rich and nuanced data on the experiences of women in Nigeria's electoral process. This data provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by women, as well as the implications of their experiences for gender equity and democratic governance.

Public awareness and perceptions of gender equality initiatives and policies

Progress in Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Nigeria

The results indicate that 70% of the respondents were aware of initiatives or policies aimed at promoting gender equality in Nigeria. When asked about the impact of these initiatives, 55% of the respondents believed that they have positively influenced women's rights and gender equality, while 25% felt that the impact was limited, and 20% were unsure or had no opinion.

Experiences of women candidates in Nigeria's electoral process

Cultural and traditional beliefs were identified by 80% of the respondents as influential factors in women's decisions to participate in politics. Financial difficulties were reported by 65% of the respondents, with limited access to campaign resources and funding hindering women candidates. Regarding support from political parties or institutions, 75% of the respondents reported instances where women candidates received limited support. The under-representation of women candidates was perceived by 85% of the respondents as negatively impacting gender equity in political decision-making.

Opportunities for women candidates in Nigeria's electoral process

Awareness of legal and constitutional provisions supporting women's participation in politics was reported by 60% of the respondents. Increasing awareness and support for women candidates amongst the general public was suggested by 70% of the respondents. Women's networks and organisations were recognised as playing a significant role in supporting women candidates by 75% of the respondents.

Experiences of women voters in Nigeria's electoral process

When asked about perceptions of women candidates, 45% of the respondents believed that women candidates were perceived less than their male counterparts. Motivations for voting varied amongst the respondents, with 30% stating a desire for gender equity and women's representation as a key factor. Barriers faced in accessing polling stations were reported by 40% of the respondents, including issues related to transportation, infrastructure, and safety concerns. The engagement of women voters was seen by 65% of the respondents as crucial for achieving gender equity in political representation.

Additional findings

In addition to the main findings, the study revealed specific challenges faced by women in the electoral process. Some respondents mentioned social stigma, gender-based violence, and lack of access to political networks as significant barriers to women's participation.

Discussion

The findings suggest that progress has been made in promoting gender equality and women's rights in Nigeria, with a considerable awareness of initiatives and policies amongst the respondents. However, challenges persist for women candidates in the electoral process, including cultural biases, financial constraints, limited support from political parties, and the under-representation of women in political offices. These challenges contribute to gender disparities in political decision-making and hinder the full participation of women in the democratic process.

The study highlights the importance of addressing cultural and traditional beliefs that discourage women's political participation. Efforts should focus on increasing awareness and support for women candidates, improving access to financial resources, promoting inclusive practices within political parties, and addressing gender-based violence and intimidation. Strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing women's networks and organisations, and adopting international best practices.

Progress in advancing gender equality and women's rights in Nigeria

In recent years, Nigeria has made significant progress in promoting gender equality and women's rights. In 2010, the government passed the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) Act, which prohibits discrimination against women in various areas of life, including education, employment, and healthcare (National Assembly of Nigeria, 2010).

Additionally, the establishment of the National Gender Policy in 2013 further highlights the government's commitment to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2013).

Nigeria's ratification of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, specifically SDG 5, emphasises the country's focus on achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls (UN, 2015).

The rise of women's rights organisations in Nigeria has played a crucial role in advocating for gender equality. These organisations work tirelessly to raise awareness about women's rights, challenge gender stereotypes, and promote the empowerment of women (Amnesty International, 2022). Despite these positive developments, significant challenges remain. Gender-based violence continues to be a pressing issue in Nigeria. High rates of violence against women pose a significant barrier to gender equality and the full realisation of women's rights (United Nations Population Fund, 2021). Additionally, low rates of female education and employment further exacerbate gender disparities. The under-representation of women in government and decision-making bodies hinders their influence and contribution to policy-making processes (International IDEA, 2021). Deep-rooted cultural and religious traditions that perpetuate gender inequality also present significant challenges (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Nevertheless, Nigeria is witnessing a growing movement for gender equality and women's rights. Women's rights organisations, government agencies, and individuals are actively working towards creating a more just and equitable society. To further promote gender equality and women's rights in Nigeria, several actions can be taken.

Challenges and strategies for promoting women's political participation in Nigeria's electoral process

Women's participation in the electoral process in Nigeria continues to be hindered by several persistent challenges. These challenges not only limit women's representation in political offices but also hinder their full participation in the democratic process. This section highlights some of the key challenges faced by women in the electoral process in Nigeria.

Cultural biases and gender stereotypes: pose significant obstacles to women's political participation. Deeply entrenched societal norms often discourage women from seeking political office or engaging in the electoral process. Traditional beliefs that prioritise male leadership and perpetuate gender roles limit the opportunities available to women in politics. Gender stereotypes that portray women as less capable or less suited for political

leadership further marginalise their participation (Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Act, 2010).

Cultural Biases

Are beliefs about the roles and abilities of men and women that are passed down from generation to generation. These biases can be very powerful, and they can discourage women from participating in politics. For example, some cultures believe that women are not as capable as men of making decisions or leading others. This can make women feel like they are not qualified to run for office, and it can discourage them from getting involved in the political process (World Bank, 2020).

Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are beliefs about the characteristics and behaviours that are appropriate for men and women. These stereotypes can be very powerful, and they can marginalise women's participation in politics. For example, some stereotypes portray women as being too emotional or too soft to be effective leaders. This can make voters less likely to support women candidates, and it can make it more difficult for women to be taken seriously in the political arena (Adlin & Basow, 2012).

The Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Bill:

The Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Act (GEWE Bill) is a Nigerian law that was passed by the House of Representatives in 2010. The GEWE Bill prohibits discrimination against women in all areas of life, including politics. The GEWE Bill also provides for the establishment of a National Gender Policy, which outlines the government's commitment to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

The GEWE Bill is an important step towards promoting women's political participation in Nigeria. However, there is still much work to be accomplished to overcome the cultural biases and gender stereotypes that discourage women from participating in politics. By educating people about the importance of gender equality and by challenging stereotypes, we can create a more just and equitable society where all citizens have a voice.

Limited access to financial resources: is another major challenge faced by women in the electoral process. Political campaigns require significant financial investments, including funding for campaign materials, advertisements, and travel expenses. Women candidates often face difficulties in accessing the necessary financial resources to run competitive campaigns. Financial constraints can create a significant disadvantage for

women, limiting their ability to effectively reach voters and convey their messages (World Bank, 2021).

- **Financial resources:** Political campaigns are expensive. Candidates need to raise money to pay for campaign materials, such as posters, flyers, and yard signs. They also need to pay for advertising, such as television commercials and radio spots. And they need to pay for travel expenses, such as fuel, hotel rooms, and meals. Women candidates often have difficulty raising the same amount of money as men candidates. This is because women are under-represented in leadership positions in the business world and in government. As a result, they have fewer personal networks that they can tap into for campaign contributions (World Bank, 2021).
- **Financial constraints:** Financial constraints can create a significant disadvantage for women candidates. They may not be able to afford to run as many television commercials or radio spots as their male counterparts. They may not be able to afford to travel to as many events or to hire as many staff members. As a result, they may have a harder time reaching voters and getting their message out (World Bank, 2021).
- **Low rates of female education and employment:** In Nigeria, low rates of female education and employment contribute to the problem of limited access to financial resources for women candidates. Women with less education and employment opportunities are more likely to be poor, and they are less likely to have the financial resources to run for office (World Bank, 2021).

The lack of support from political parties: is another barrier to women's political participation. Political parties play a crucial role in candidate selection, campaign support, and resource allocation. However, women often face challenges in securing party nominations and receiving adequate support from party structures. Discrimination within political parties, including biased candidate selection processes and limited inclusion of women in leadership positions, perpetuate gender disparities in political representation (International IDEA, 2021).

- In Nigeria, women hold only 11.6% of seats in the National Assembly, which is significantly lower than the global average of 24.3%. According to a study conducted by the Women's Political Participation and Leadership Project, women in Nigeria face discouragement from running for office, with party officials expressing beliefs that they lack qualifications or chances of winning (Africa Barometer, 2024). Furthermore, the study revealed that women candidates often encounter discrimination within political parties, including denial of resources and

instances of sexual harassment. These findings highlight the significant challenges and barriers faced by women in Nigeria's political landscape.

Gender-based violence and intimidation: during electoral campaigns pose serious threats to women's political participation. Women candidates and their supporters are often subjected to verbal abuse, physical attacks, and threats of violence. These acts of intimidation aim to discourage women from actively participating in politics and undermine their confidence in engaging in the electoral process. Such acts not only violate women's rights but also create a climate of fear that hinders their full political engagement (United Nations Population Fund, 2021).

- A comprehensive body of research highlights the pervasive issue of gender-based violence and intimidation during electoral campaigns, which significantly impacts women's political participation and the overall democratic process. Studies conducted by International IDEA in 2020 and the United Nations in 2021 demonstrate that women are disproportionately subjected to verbal abuse, physical attacks, and threats aimed at deterring their active engagement in politics and undermining their confidence in the electoral process. These acts not only discourage women from running for office but also decrease their campaign success rates and increase the likelihood of their withdrawal from politics entirely.
- Additionally, the World Bank (2019) emphasises how gender-based violence and intimidation limit women's access to essential resources such as education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. These examples showcase the multifaceted impact of gender-based violence and intimidation, not only harming individual women but also eroding the democratic fabric by silencing the voices of half the population. Recognising and addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering inclusive and robust political participation.

Voter suppression is yet another challenge faced by women in the electoral process. Women voters may encounter various barriers that limit their ability to exercise their voting rights. These barriers include limited awareness of their political rights, social pressures, and discriminatory practices at polling stations. Voter suppression tactics, such as voter intimidation and deliberate exclusion of women from the electoral process, undermine women's participation and the overall legitimacy of the democratic process (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2013). **Voter intimidation:** This can include anything from verbal abuse to physical threats to prevent women from voting. For example, women may be threatened

with violence if they try to vote, or they may be called names or harassed at the polls.

- Limited awareness of political rights: Many women are not aware of their right to vote, or they may not know how to register to vote or how to cast a ballot. This can be because of a lack of education, language barriers, or social stigmas.
- Social pressures: Women may face social pressure from their families, friends, or communities to not vote. For example, they may be told that voting is a man's job, or they may be afraid of being ostracised or shamed if they do vote.

These voter suppression tactics can have a significant impact on women's political participation. They can make it more difficult for women to register to vote, to cast a ballot, and to be elected to office. This can undermine women's participation in the democratic process and limit their ability to have a voice in government.

Strategies for promoting women's political participation

To address these persistent challenges and promote women's full participation in the electoral process, a multi-faceted approach is required. Efforts should focus on:

Raising awareness and challenging cultural biases: Education and awareness campaigns can help challenge gender stereotypes and traditional beliefs that hinder women's political participation. These campaigns should target both women and men, promoting the value of women's leadership and the benefits of gender equality in politics.

To promote women's political participation and challenge cultural biases, several approaches can be employed. Educating men and women about gender equality in politics through schools, workplaces, and community organisations is crucial. Awareness campaigns should be launched to highlight the challenges faced by women in politics, utilising various communication channels. Providing role models and showcasing the accomplishments of women in political positions can inspire other women to enter politics. Establishing support networks through women's organisations and political parties can offer guidance and mentorship to aspiring female politicians. By implementing these measures, cultural biases can be confronted, and a more inclusive political environment can be created. Specific examples include campaigns that showcase women's achievements, debunk myths, and encourage women to run for office by providing resources and information. Overall, raising awareness about the challenges faced by

women in politics and promoting the value of women's leadership can lead to a more equitable and representative political landscape.

Enhancing financial support: Initiatives should be developed to provide financial resources and support to women candidates. This can include creating dedicated funding mechanisms, providing training on fundraising and financial management, and encouraging public and private sector sponsorship of women's political campaigns. Here are some ways to enhance financial support for women candidates:

- Create dedicated funding mechanisms: Governments can create dedicated funding mechanisms to provide financial support to women candidates. This could be achieved through public funding, tax breaks, or other measures.
- Provide training on fundraising and financial management: Women candidates often lack the skills and knowledge necessary to raise and manage campaign funds. Training programmes can help women candidates develop the skills they need to be successful fundraisers.
- Encourage public and private sector sponsorship: Public and private sector organisations can sponsor women's political campaigns. This can help to create a more equitable environment for women candidates and give them a chance to compete on an equal footing with their male counterparts.

These are examples of how dedicated funding mechanisms can be used to provide financial support to women candidates:

- A government could create a fund that provides grants to women candidates who meet certain criteria. For example, the fund could provide grants to women candidates who are running for office in competitive races or who are facing financial challenges.
- A government could create a tax break for individuals and businesses who donate to women's political campaigns. This would encourage more people to donate to women's campaigns and would make it easier for women candidates to raise money.

Promoting inclusive party practices: Political parties should adopt measures to ensure fair representation and support for women candidates. This can include implementing gender quotas, establishing transparent candidate selection processes, and providing training and mentorship opportunities for women within party structures.

- Implementing gender quotas: Political parties can implement gender quotas to ensure that a certain percentage of their candidates are women. This can be achieved by requiring that a certain percentage of the party's

candidates be women, or by reserving a certain number of seats in the party's leadership for women.

- Establishing transparent candidate selection processes: Political parties can establish transparent candidate selection processes to ensure that all candidates, regardless of gender, have an equal opportunity to be selected. This can be achieved by publishing the criteria for selecting candidates, by holding open meetings to discuss the selection process, and by allowing all members of the party to participate in the selection process.
- Providing training and mentorship opportunities for women within party structures: Political parties can provide training and mentorship opportunities for women within party structures to help them develop the skills and knowledge that they need to be successful candidates. This can be achieved by providing training on campaign management, fundraising, and public speaking, as well as by providing mentorship from experienced female politicians.

By taking these steps, political parties can help to ensure that women have a fair chance to be elected to office and to participate in the political process.

Here are some specific examples of how political parties can implement gender quotas:

- A political party could require that 50% of its candidates be women. This would ensure that women are equally represented in the party's candidate pool.
- A political party could reserve 30% of its seats in the party's leadership for women. This would ensure that women have a significant voice in the party's decision-making process.

By implementing gender quotas, political parties can help to ensure that women have a fair chance to be elected to office and to participate in the political process.

Here are some specific examples of how political parties can establish transparent candidate selection processes:

- A political party could publish the criteria for selecting candidates. This would ensure that all candidates know what is expected of them and that the selection process is fair.
- A political party could hold open meetings to discuss the selection process. This would allow all members of the party to participate in the process and to provide input on the selection of candidates.

- A political party could allow all members of the party to vote on the selection of candidates. This would ensure that the selection process is democratic and that all members of the party have a voice in the process.

By establishing transparent candidate selection processes, political parties can help to ensure that all candidates, regardless of gender, have an equal opportunity to be selected.

Here are some specific examples of how political parties can provide training and mentorship opportunities for women within party structures:

- A political party could provide training on campaign management. This would help women to develop the skills they need to run a successful campaign.
- A political party could provide training on fundraising. This would help women to raise the money that they need to run a successful campaign.
- A political party could provide training on public speaking. This would help women to communicate their message effectively to voters.
- A political party could provide mentorship from experienced female politicians. This would help women to learn from the experiences of other women who have successfully run for office.

By providing training and mentorship opportunities for women, political parties can help to ensure that women have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful candidates.

Combatting gender-based violence: Strong measures should be taken to prevent and address gender-based violence during electoral campaigns. This includes strengthening laws and enforcement mechanisms, providing security and protection for women candidates, and raising awareness about the consequences of such acts. Here are some ways to combat gender-based violence during electoral campaigns:

- Strengthening laws and enforcement mechanisms: Governments can strengthen laws and enforcement mechanisms to deter and punish gender-based violence. This could include enacting new laws, increasing funding for law enforcement, and training law enforcement officers on how to respond to gender-based violence.
- Providing security and protection for women candidates: Governments and political parties can provide security and protection for women candidates who are at risk of violence. This could include providing bodyguards, installing security cameras, and conducting risk assessments.
- Raising awareness about the consequences of gender-based violence: Governments and civil society organisations can raise awareness about

the consequences of gender-based violence. This could be achieved through public awareness campaigns, educational programmes, and media coverage.

By taking these steps, we can help to create a more secure and safe environment for women candidates.

Here are some specific examples of how governments can strengthen laws and enforcement mechanisms:

- A government could enact a law that makes it a crime to threaten or intimidate a woman candidate. This law could include a provision for stiff penalties, such as jail time or fines.
- A government could increase funding for law enforcement to allow them to investigate and prosecute cases of gender-based violence. This would help to ensure that perpetrators of violence are brought to justice.
- A government could train law enforcement officers on how to respond to gender-based violence. This training would help officers to understand the dynamics of violence and to develop effective responses.

By taking these steps, governments can help to deter and punish gender-based violence. Here are some specific examples of how governments and political parties can provide security and protection for women candidates:

- A government could provide bodyguards for women candidates who are at risk of violence. This would help to protect women candidates from physical harm.
- A government could install security cameras in areas where women candidates are likely to be campaigning. This would help to deter violence and to identify perpetrators.
- A government could conduct risk assessments for women candidates who are at risk of violence. This would help to identify the specific threats that women candidates face and to develop appropriate security measures.

By taking these steps, governments and political parties can help to create a more secure and safe environment for women candidates.

Here are some specific examples of how governments and civil society organisations can raise awareness about the consequences of gender-based violence:

- A government could launch a public awareness campaign about gender-based violence. This campaign could use billboards, television adverts, and social media to raise awareness about the issue.

- A government could work with schools and universities to develop educational programmes about gender-based violence. These programmes could teach students about the dynamics of violence and about how to prevent it.
- A government could work with the media to cover stories about gender-based violence. This coverage could help to raise awareness about the issue and to challenge stereotypes about women.

By taking these steps, governments and civil society organisations can help to create a more just and equitable society for all.

Ensuring equal access to voting: Efforts should be made to eliminate barriers that prevent women from exercising their right to vote. This includes conducting voter education campaigns, addressing social pressures and discriminatory practices at polling stations, and providing accessible and safe voting environments for all (UN, 2015). Here are some ways to ensure equal access to voting for women:

- Conducting voter education campaigns: Governments and civil society organisations can conduct voter education campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of voting and to inform women about the process of voting. These campaigns can be conducted through a variety of channels, such as television, radio, social media, and community events.
- Addressing social pressures and discriminatory practices at polling stations: Governments and civil society organisations can work to address social pressures and discriminatory practices that discourage women from voting. This could include working with communities to challenge stereotypes about women's roles in society and to create a more welcoming environment for women at polling stations.
- Providing accessible and safe voting environments for all: Governments can work to provide accessible and safe voting environments for all voters, including women. This could include providing accessible polling places, making voting materials available in multiple languages, and providing security at polling stations.

By taking these steps, we can help to ensure that all women have equal access to the voting booth and that their voices are heard in government.

Here are some specific examples of how governments and civil society organisations can conduct voter education campaigns:

- A government could produce a television advert that features women talking about why they vote. This advert could be broadcast on national and local television stations.

- A civil society organisation could create a social media campaign that uses hashtags and images to raise awareness about the importance of voting. This campaign could be shared on Twitter (X), Facebook, and other social media platforms.
- A community organisation could hold a voter registration drive at a local grocery store or community centre. This drive could help to register new voters and to inform them about the voting process.

By taking these steps, governments and civil society organisations can help to raise awareness about the importance of voting and to encourage women to vote.

Here are some specific examples of how governments and civil society organisations can address social pressures and discriminatory practices at polling stations:

- A government could work with community leaders to develop a plan to address social pressures and discriminatory practices at polling stations. This plan could include training poll workers on how to handle these situations and could provide resources for women who experience harassment or intimidation at the polls.
- A civil society organisation could create a hotline that women can call if they experience harassment or intimidation at the polls. This hotline could provide support and resources to women who have been harassed or intimidated.
- A community organisation could hold a workshop for women on how to handle harassment and intimidation at the polls. This workshop could teach women how to identify and report harassment and intimidation, and could provide them with strategies for dealing with these situations.

By taking these steps, governments and civil society organisations can help to create a more welcoming environment for women at polling stations.

Here are some specific examples of how governments can provide accessible and safe voting environments for all:

- A government could provide transportation to polling stations for voters who need it. This could be achieved by providing shuttle buses or vans to transport voters to and from the polls.
- A government could make voting materials available in multiple languages. This could be achieved by providing bilingual ballots and voter guides.
- A government could provide security at polling stations. This could be achieved by hiring security guards or by installing security cameras.

By taking these steps, governments can help to ensure that all voters, including women, have access to a safe and accessible voting environment.

Despite the progress made in promoting women's political participation in Nigeria, persistent challenges continue to impede women's full engagement in the electoral process. Addressing cultural biases, improving access to financial resources, promoting inclusive party practices, combatting gender-based violence, and ensuring equal access to voting are essential steps towards creating a more inclusive and democratic political landscape that empowers women and upholds their rights.

Opportunities for women candidates and voters in Nigeria's electoral process

1. **Legal and policy framework:** Nigeria has a legal and policy framework that promotes women's political participation, including the National Gender Policy, which seeks to eliminate discrimination against women and promote their full participation in politics and governance. Additionally, Nigeria has a constitutional provision that mandates the inclusion of women in governance and decision-making processes (UN Women, 2019).
2. **Quotas:** Nigeria has introduced quotas to increase the representation of women in politics, including a 35% affirmative action policy for women's representation in government positions. Although the quota system is not yet fully implemented, it has created opportunities for women to participate in politics and governance (Krook, 2013).
3. **Women's groups and networks:** Women's groups and networks have been instrumental in advocating for women's rights and increasing women's political participation in Nigeria. These groups provide support and resources for women candidates and voters and facilitate networking and collaboration amongst women (Krook & Restrepo Sanin, 2019).
4. **Women's representation in political parties:** Women's representation in political parties has increased in recent years, creating opportunities for women to participate in decision-making and leadership positions within the parties (Krook & Restrepo Sanin, 2019).
5. **Increased awareness and education:** There has been an increase in awareness and education amongst women regarding their political rights and opportunities. This has led to more women participating in the electoral process as voters and candidates (UN Women, 2019).
6. **Leadership development programmes:** The Women's Leadership Institute (WLI) is a programme in Nigeria that offers leadership training and mentorship for women. The WLI is a joint initiative of the Centre

- for African Women Economic Empowerment (CAWEE) and the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF).
7. Women's Caucus: The National Assembly Women's Caucus was established in 2000 and has been active in advocating for women's rights and issues in Nigeria. The caucus has sponsored several bills related to women's rights, including the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Bill (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2015).
 8. Women's representation in electoral management bodies: The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Nigeria has made efforts to increase women's representation in its leadership and management positions. For example, in 2018, Amina Zakari was appointed as the INEC's Acting Chairman, becoming the first woman to hold the position.
 9. Social media and digital platforms: Social media and digital platforms have become important tools for political communication and mobilisation in Nigeria. Women candidates and voters can use these platforms to reach a wider audience and connect with potential supporters. The Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD, 2015) found that social media played a significant role in the 2015 Nigerian elections, with candidates and political parties using social media to mobilise supporters and share campaign messages.
 10. Supportive allies and networks: Women candidates and voters in Nigeria can benefit from supportive allies and networks, including men who advocate for women's rights and gender equality. The Men's Support for Women's Participation in Governance (MESUPG) is a group in Nigeria that advocates for women's participation in politics and governance. The MESUPG provides resources and support for women candidates and also works to educate men on the importance of gender equity in governance.

Implications for gender equity and democratic governance in Nigeria:

1. Increased representation of women in politics: According to a report by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), *Women's Political Participation in Nigeria: Mapping Progress, Bridging Gaps*, women make up only 6.7% of Nigeria's National Assembly (2015; NDI, 2016).
2. Improved gender equity in governance: Research has shown that when women are represented in politics, they tend to focus on issues that affect women and marginalised groups, leading to improved gender equity in governance (Krook, 2013).
3. Strengthened democracy: Studies have shown that a more inclusive and diverse political system can lead to greater citizen engagement and participation, which is essential for a strong and healthy democracy (Htun & Weldon, 2012).

4. Improved protection of women's rights: According to a report by Amnesty International, women in Nigeria face significant human rights abuses, including sexual violence and discrimination (Amnesty International, 2017).
5. Improved social and economic development: Increasing women's representation in politics can help to address issues that disproportionately affect women, such as gender-based violence, access to education, and economic empowerment. Addressing these issues can contribute to overall social and economic development in Nigeria (Okonta, 2017).
6. Increased public trust and legitimacy: A more inclusive and equitable political system can help to increase public trust and legitimacy in government institutions. When citizens feel that their voices are being heard and that they have a stake in the political process, they are more likely to trust and support their government (Bratton & Mattes, 2003).
7. Enhanced human rights protection: Women's participation in politics can also help to enhance the protection of human rights, particularly women's rights. Women in politics can advocate for policies and programmes that protect women's rights, such as laws against domestic violence and sexual harassment (Ezeilo, 2018).
8. Greater diversity of perspectives: When women are represented in politics, there is a greater diversity of perspectives and experiences that can be brought to bear on policy decisions. This can help to ensure that policies and programmes are designed to meet the needs of all citizens, rather than just a select few (Tripp, 2013).

Therefore, there is a need for greater gender equity and democratic governance in Nigeria. Addressing the challenges faced by women candidates and voters in the electoral process can help to create a more inclusive and equitable political system that promotes greater participation, engagement, and accountability for all citizens, regardless of gender.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter highlights the significant challenges faced by women candidates and voters in Nigeria's electoral process, despite legal and constitutional provisions promoting gender equality and women's political participation. The study recommends the need for targeted interventions, including capacity-building programmes, affirmative action policies, and increased financial support for women candidates. It also emphasises the need for greater support from political parties and institutions, increased awareness and education amongst women voters, and the development of

policies and programmes that address gender-based violence. Ultimately, the implementation of these recommendations can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable political system in Nigeria, promoting greater gender equity and democratic governance in the country and beyond.

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